

Horror in Culture & Entertainment

RUE MOORQUE

DON COSCARELLI AND DIRECTOR DAVID HARTMAN
ON THE END OF THE ICONIC SERIES

PHANTASM RAVAGER

NEW
• A TRIBUTE TO THE TALL MAN •
• J.J. ABRAMS' REMASTERED PHANTASM •

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AND THE REPTILE
TURN 30

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16 EXIT THE TALL MAN

With its final chapter and the death of the actor who played its iconic villain, one of horror's most loved franchises bids a fond farewell. Finally, neither *Pleasantville* nor the story behind it is at all conventional. **PLUS:** Angus Scrimm's co-stars remember the man behind the scowling face of the Phantom movies, and a look at the restoration of the original film by JOHN W. GOWEN

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Fifty years ago, boundary-pushing companion films *The Plague of the Zombies* and *The Reptile* changed the very notion of what it means to be Hammer Horror. **PLUS:** Gothic scholar and Cornwall resident Ruth Heholt tells us why England's isolated peninsula simply "lends itself to darkness" by JEFF SZPIRGLAS

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An EC-style horror comic gets a psycho-suff soundtrack with the Grim County Canevess' *Tales From Grim County*. **PLUS:** A review of *The Magnificent Seven's* Tall Tales & Scary Stories by APRIL EMBELLINGS and DAVE ALEXANDER



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NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND

My TV levels are dangerously high right now. I'm Phantasm-ing about drinking a Phantasm Free away, or a Phantasm in Phantasm. But that's to be expected when there's phantasm Phantasm news, specifically a new movie and the 4K restoration of the original. If you're a Phant, like I am, this is bigger than the engine block on a '71 Barracuda, and twice as hot.

One last adventure with Reggie, Mike, Jack and the Tall Man 37 years after the first film is a miraculous thing. With the failure of the proposed big-budget Roger Avey-panned Phantasm's End, nearly two decades without a sequel and the death of Angus Scrimm this January, it's also a bittersweet coda to a remarkable horror franchise.

I love movies that create their own sprawling mythology, and I can't think of a horror series that does it better than Phantasm. A gore-tobling Mercian in an 4-ting suit, his army of undead dwarfs, those letter-flying spheres that can trip a person's soul, time travel and parallel dimensions, a pending apocalypse, psychic abilities, a derby ice-cream-race hero with loads of weapons and little luck with the ladies—over the course of five films, writer/director Don Coscarelli has gone balls-out (pun very much intended) imagining this world.

Then there's the "cute aspect." Explosions, muscle cars, motorcycles, buses, booty-braps, gags, a four-barrelled shotgun—bring it. Yet, though the movies veer in masculinity, they constantly undercut it with Reggie's misadventures. When it comes to karmas, Phantasm's attitude is Phant.

There's a uniquely dark Scooby-Ding flavor to the series that makes it ahead of its time. By adding gore, nudity, violence and death into the mix I see it as a more grown-up version of the close-knit-team-against-supernatural-evil narrative, a sort-of bridge between 1984's *Shogun* (the Phantasm team element really gets in 1984's sequel) and *Ti's* *Body the Vampire Slayer* (1987). Our heroes might joke around while driving off into the sunset in the 'coda but death is always near. However, if your friends leave your back, you just might see a nother day. And friendship is the emotional core of the Phantasm world. There's a lack of irony to the characters that give it heart, especially as we see those pups age over half a lifetime.

Some find that while but many of us love it, including J.J. Abrams, who's such a big Phant, he not only spearheaded the aforementioned restoration, he gave Scrimm a recurring role in his TV series *Alfred* and named a drama-confirmed *Starliner* in *Star Wars* (episode 18 "Phantasm") as a tribute (paperwork given that *Star Wars* was in influence on Phantasm—think of the jaw-like dwarfs and the training sphere that shoots a laser beam). With Abrams' new *Star Wars* being the highest grossing domestic film of all time, plus his other hugely successful projects, including the *Star Trek* reboot, TV series *Lost*, the *Greenlight* movies, the *Mad Max* franchise and *Super 8*, the writer/director/producer is the biggest name in Hollywood. But just how much away has Phantasm had on his work?

You can see its influence in a general sense in the way that many of Abrams' projects take a small group of dedicated friends/lovely members/semi-quintet and drags them into a tale of action, sci-fi (including time travel and multiple dimensions), horror and mystery. Phantasm casts a particularly long shadow over one of his early projects, the script for the 2001 movie *Jarhead*, which features two brothers on a road trip, in a classic car, who are chased a mysterious lost gun.

Abrams also worked with Eric Kloppe on the post-apocalypse series *Revolution* (2012–2014), which featured revolutionary fighters who lose a parent. Kloppe is the creator of *Supernatural*, a show featuring two brothers dealing with the loss of their parents, travelling the country in a classic muscle car sporting a trunk full of modified weaponry while hunting supernatural entities with aid of occult weapons and psychic powers. (Picture: *Supernatural*'s black '67 Impala above Phantasm's black '71 Barracuda.) Now in its eleventh season, the show is the longest-running American sci-fi series. Before that, Kloppe wrote the 1995 movie *Requiem*, which features a young man trying to get over parental loss by going after the otherworldly creature that attacked him in his bedroom, steals children and has a part through space and time. Sounds familiar?

Most recently, echoes of Phantasm's battle can be seen in the hugely popular Internet-born horror icon the *Slender Man*, a frightening tall, pale, black suit-wearing figure at the centre of online folklores, a web series, a video game and a feature. Creator Eric Knudsen has noted in interviews that the Tall Man is one of the characters' touchstones.

Given all of this, it's no wonder Phantasm experience a certain amount of frustration in the difficulties Coscarelli has had switching his series—from Phantasm's *End* to the micro-budget of the first installment, *Awake*. So, take heart in the fact that the little horror-series-that-could continue to influence some of the biggest properties and players in the genre. The Tall Man will be with us, always.

It's enough to make a grown Phant cry

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RUE MORGUE PHANTASM would not have been possible without the valuable assistance of Nicole De Jackson, Mary-Dee Holzer, Al McKellan, Gopi Patel, Ek Bendoric and Janelle Bendoric.

COVER PHANTASM RAVAGER

Illustration by Andrew Wright

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POST MORTEM

COMMENT • QUESTION • ANSWER



JUST GOT THE new issue with Rob Zornitz (RMR165) While I enjoyed the Grenadine section (Southbound, Nelsons, etc.), it needed to be longer than just three pieces. More please!

ANDREW BULL, VIA FACULTY

THANK YOU FOR FINALLY shining a long-overdue spotlight on the beautiful horrors of *The Redfishing Son* (RMM164). This overlooked gem is a real masterpiece of existential horror and the fear that lies just beneath the surface. It's a handy subtitle in its portrayal of violence and human suffering, yet it's uniquely sublime in its depiction of that suffering. The handsome and alluring serial killers, the weirdly decorated house of tarpon and fish skulls in the middle of a limboed field, the gorgeous spinning sequence where the fields of wheat suddenly give way to an impass and bloody surprise. I strongly urge everyone who appreciates well-crafted independent movies to seek it out.

FOR SHEWELL & MITCHELL, SENIOR

I JUST WANTED to say thanks for *RMP164* and your Note From Underground [about the book *Outlaws and Lawmen of Western Canada*]. I found *Southern Fried Rat & Other Ghoulish Tales* by Daniel Cohen to be that book for me. It has some of my favourites



the dangers of eating takeout in the dark, "The Second/nd Evening Gown," referencing the clothes stolen from corpses, "The Missing Bride" and "Wendigo," of course I used to be frightened of the cover when I was younger, it was kept hidden beneath a chair at my family's bedtime.

NANCY — ADDRESS WITHHELD

JUST READ AMY and I think it looks magnificent! Thank you for doing such a wonderful piece on *The Reflecting Skin*! It's one of the best laid out and presented interviews I've ever had done. Each page is worth framing. Keep up the good work, guys!

PHILIP RIDLEY – LONDON, ENGLAND

YOUR BREADLINE PIECE on the passings of George Clayton Johnson, Lemmy, Angus Scrimm and David Bowie in *RMH* was well done. I was a huge fan of Logan's *Run* when I was a kid and was lucky enough to find the book years later at a yard sale. I am but

Phantoms in and will miss Angus Scrimm. As for Lemmy and David Bowie, the world will never be the same without them. Your article on the Cave of the Crystal Skull here was spooky because of what happened the centuries ago. My one gripe is on Dave Alexander's review of *Deathgasm*. Too bad he didn't like it too much. I found it enjoyable, with the exception of a few things, but as they say, opinions vary.

SEN KASTEN, VIA FACEBOOK

THANK YOU FOR not rating over *Deathgasm* in your review in the March issue. I thought the movie was okay. Enjoyable enough and I'm glad I saw it. But my social media feeds have been full of people raving and gushing over this "must-see instant classic." Maybe it's because I'm old and have seen a lot of movies. I'll agree that *Deathgasm* was fun but other than a guy wearing a copse permit trying to not let an ice cream cone, it really didn't offer much. I haven't seen before. I thought I was alone in my mild feelings about it. Thanks for making me feel not quite so alone. Maybe their next movie will be the one that gets to me.

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WOW SO GLAD you did an article about the Moyates and the ATM cave in RMFF184. My wife and I explored that cave as our first vacation as a couple back in 2010 and to this day it is our favourite travel experience. We recommend it to everyone looking for something fun, exciting and out of the ordinary. We never saw any fer-de-lances but our guide did make us wait for them. [See more...](#)

JASON AND JENNY CONTINO
- BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

AVE MORGUE SAYS I'm Australian. It's not true! Rice review of *Dreams From the Witch House* (in *GRIMES* though).

DE YNDE JENNECK, VIA TWITTEO

[Our apologies, Lynne. We now know that you reside in Auckland, New Zealand – Ed]

EXPIRING MINDS

ON RIVE MONROE'S
FACEDOWN PAGE

What weapon unique to a horror movie would you choose to vanquish your enemies?

My favourite, the focus of Hell-summoning
this computer and cylinder from Calligrafi

2015 FALL CITY

Pyramidal Neuron's megaword from *Silent Hill*
I might need some help with it.

DAVID W. JOHNS

Double-barrel shotgun from Phonsavan & hands down.

WINTERBURN, 1992

holding needles, and splints from Jexile, because they're readily available, and they bleed well.

MICHAEL A. S. CLARKE

Gulls go big on this one: Victor Crowley's new musical built under less than ideal

LAURENCE J. KATZ

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JOHN FRISVOLD

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NEWS HIGHLIGHTS — HORROR HAPPENINGS

CULT HORROR COMIC *GORE SHRIEK* GETS A RELAUNCH

Thirty years after its 1986 debut, legendary indie horror comic *Gore Shriek* is enjoying a revival.

FantaCo Publications' notoriously gruesome anthology had an all-too-short run in the late '70s and a brief resurgence in the early '80s. Only thirteen issues and a handful of specials were produced, but it was enough to secure the title a well-deserved place in horror comics history. The indie series had small print runs with black-and-white interiors and modest production values, but it boasted completely over-the-top gore and turned out to be a proving ground for some noteworthy talent, including *Sawyer* and *Batman* artist Greg Capullo and creature designer/prosthetic makeup artist Brian Spaulding Fuller.

Now, FantaCo is teaming up with Rough House Publishing — the company behind 2015's *The Dead* Omnibus — to resurrect *Gore Shriek* with two new issues this year.

"The *Gore Shriek* fans have asked for a relaunch since the week the title stopped being published," says FantaCo founder and *Gore Shriek* creator Tom Skoun. "However, interest noticeably picked up following the death of [writer, journalist and *Gore Shriek* contributor] Chris Baker in 2009."

That interest continued to snowball, and May finally saw the release of the 48-page *Gore Shriek Resurrected Volume 1*, with a second volume to follow in October. Both issues, which feature new stories and art, were funded by a Kickstarter campaign that exceeded its \$6,000 goal to raise a total of \$7252.

Rough House's Derek Rook says the new issues are a perfect opportunity to enlist artists who were "born for the role" of drawing *Gore Shriek* stories but didn't have a chance to put their skills to work on the book's earlier incarnations.

"Among these monster badasses are Pauli Matti Carr, Jeff Zornow, Mark Bloodworth and Austen Mangler," says



Rook, who will also contribute art to the new issues. "These guys are, in my opinion, the creamiest pus of the pulpcore, bloody crap. But that's not where it ends. We wanted this to be a 'resurrectus' proper, and that wouldn't be possible without *Gore Shriek* fan favorites Bruce Spaulding Fuller, Eric Starway, Gerhard

"The Garth" Singh and the one and only Stephen Bissette! All of these guys are coming back with all-new stories and artwork."

Rook sees the relaunch as an opportunity to give readers and horror fans the kind of experience that has become increasingly rare in today's more commercially-minded comics shops. He wants to create high-quality, hand-drawn books that fans will cherish for decades to come.

"In the past 30 years, we've made the trip completely full circle," Rook says of how readers' tastes have evolved since *Gore*



Shriek's first outing. "If we were going to use music recording and distribution as an analogy, then the Big Three would be recorded on iPhones and uploaded to the Cloud, and the middle guys would go digital on CD. That leaves us definitely recording on two-inch tape that's then transcribed to vinyl. Ironically, vinyl is coming back in a big way, and so is the nostalgia for how things used to be prepared, marketed and presented to audiences. Instead of our books simply being advertisements for bigger and more profitable intellectual properties, our books themselves are the draw."

With only the first two issues financed by the crowdfunding campaign, Rook says the future of *Gore Shriek* will depend entirely on reader response. He and Skoun are definitely up for more, if fan support stays strong.

"If [fans] go out and purchase the *Resurrected* volumes in droves, then the possibility of an official *Gore Shriek* Volume 3 [or an] ongoing series will be closer to reality," Rook allows. "The fans made this possible in the first place. Ultimately they are in charge of its future. If they want it bad enough, we'll give it to 'em!"

APRIL SNELLINGS

SOSKA TWINS BRING THEIR OWN BODY HORROR AESTHETIC TO *RABID* REMAKE

The Internet was abuzz when it was announced at the end of February that the Twisted Twins were going to be adapting the first remake of a David Cronenberg movie. This summer, Vancouver-based, identical twin filmmakers Jen and Sylvia Soska — known for their features *Dead Monster in a Trunk*, *American Mary* and *See No Evil 2* — will helm an update of the legendary Canadian director's 1977 release *Rabid*.

"I want it to be a tribute to his original and his work," says Jen (pictured left). "We love him. Without him there would be no us. He's the original trailblazer. We have so much respect for him."

Sylvia (pictured right) adds that the project doesn't come without some anxiety. "It's terrifying, though. The response has been incredibly loud, but you have the original made by a master of his craft. There is definitely a lot of pressure to deliver, which is exciting."

Made by famous Montreal-based genre producers Grecois, *Rabid* was Cronenberg's second feature film and starred porn star Marilyn Chambers as Rose, a woman who develops a taste for blood after undergoing experimental plastic surgery. Rose comes to infect an increasing number of victims and sparks a city-wide epidemic of rabid, blood-thirsty zombies.

"It's almost like it's being pulled from the headlines of today with its themes of explosive violence, sexual aggression towards women and human beings acting like rabid animals," points out Sylvia. "That, too, was something David Cronenberg was already commenting about almost 40 years ago. Its themes are ripe for expansion and further commentary."

Jen adds, "I love the themes of *Rabid*: the sexual predator nature of it alongside the breakdown of society. We see so much distract of one another right now. People aren't looked and that's a very scary thing when you think about it. Those issues are even more prevalent now than ever. It's like Cronenberg could predict this with his initial film. There's plenty here to explore."

Along with *Slivers* (p.k.s. *They Came From Within*, 1975) and later *The Brood* (1979), *Rabid* cemented Cronenberg's reputation for being the Master of Body Horror, a title that became emblematic of his output.

The remake of *Rabid* is being made by John V. Dieth's Toronto-based company Sownville House Releasing, in conjunction with Paul Landale and Michael Walker of Stony Creek Entertainment, and Tim Cherry. Dieth is a producer on the iconic Canadian drama *Making a Man* (1972), starring Donald Sutherland. Stony Creek is the



company behind Christine-themed apocalypse thrillers such as the *Left Behind* series, and the faith-based documentary *The Rapture: The Beginning of the End*, which was written and directed by Cherry.

"Being niche — Canadian directors who specialize in female-centric body horror — finally put us at the top of the list when the producing team was looking for directors to helm the project," says Sylvia.

The twins were drawn to the project because it will allow them to further explore their body horror themes that run through their previous work, particularly 2012's *American Mary*.

"We love body horror, so anyone who's seen *American Mary* can attest to," says Jen. "I love

that we get to go back and play in that field again. It's so rich. And Cronenberg has this signature sexual style to his body horror. I'm very excited to explore that."

The Soskas' last feature, *Vexx*, was a re-wrote, move, and took them out of the genre they're so steeped in. Sylvia asserts that *Rabid* will be a welcome return.

"It's so wonderful to be getting back to body horror. This is sci-fi body horror, so it's very creative with Rose's side effects from her procedure. I like having that freedom in being creative — looking at what we have and deciding how we are going to tell this story in a way that leaves an impact on the audience."

DEBBIE BLACK



DUBLIN GHOST STORY FESTIVAL CELEBRATES IRELAND'S LITERARY PAST AND PRESENT

Many places have spooky literary legacies, but not all of them celebrate it. This summer, Dublin, Ireland, will become a city that does. The country's long tradition of ghost stories will be explored and honoured at the inaugural Dublin Ghost Story Festival, which will take place August 19 to 21 at the city's Grand Lodge of Ireland (described as "the oldest Freemason lodge in continuous existence").

"I really enjoyed the genre events I'd attended in the UK over the years, everything from FantasyCon to World Horror, from the Madmen Society dinners to M.R. James gatherings," explains author and *Rue Morgue* contributor Brian J. Showers, one of what inspired him to create the Festival. "I thought to myself, with such a strong literary heritage and so many landmark contributions to fantastical literature over the centuries, why don't we have more events like this in Ireland? The solution was daunting, but obvious."

The Dublin Ghost Story Festival will have Dublin-born author John Connolly (Every Dead Thing as its Master of Ceremonies, author Adam Nevill (*The Ribz*) has been tapped as the guest of honour, and author/playwright Robert Lloyd Parry will perform his critically acclaimed *Ghost Stories* of M.R. James one-man show. On Sunday,

Showers, who penned the 2006 book *Literary Walking Tours of Dublin*, will host a guided tour of gothic Dublin, featuring the former residences of authors Sheridan Le Fanu and Bram Stoker. Additional guests and activities will be added in the coming months.

"We're hoping to keep things quite casual, putting the emphasis on discussion and social interaction," emphasises Showers. "In addition to [Parry's] M.R. James play, we'll have panel discussions, readings and a dealer room where you can buy some great books. Other authors will also be in attendance as well, like Sarah Pemberton, John Reppion and Lynda E. Rucker, so there will be plenty of time for friendly chats over pints as well. Be sure to schedule some time to see the city too, we've got Bram Stoker's birthplace, Le Fanu's resting place and the infamous mummies at St. Michan's Church."

The thing that sets the Dublin Ghost Story Festival apart from other conventions, however, is its focus on one particular part of the genre.

"Most other genre conventions and festivals seem to focus on science fiction and fantasy, with horror trailing behind, and the 'spookier' forms of horror even further behind that," Showers notes. "But at the Dublin Ghost Story Festival



we're going to completely indulge in the supernatural, the uncanny, and the strange. To my knowledge there aren't any other festivals like this one."

Weekend passes to the Dublin Ghost Story Festival can be purchased for 30 Euros. The event will be limited to 150 tickets.

For more information on the Dublin Ghost Story Festival, visit www.westpress.ie/dub2016.html

MONICA S. KUEHLER

ENTRAILS

With Olive Barker's *Heidi* remake seemingly on hold, creator Gary Tanabele has revealed that he's in post-production on another film in the franchise: *Heidi's Judgement*. The movie will feature a group of new, non-Gemobile models, including three females known as the Jury and another named The Decider. However, while Pinhead will appear in *Heidi's Judgement*, original Pinhead actor Doug Bradley will not reprise his role, he looked at long asked



to sign a "gagging order" that would have prevented him from discussing the script. Steps and film actor Paul T. Taylor has taken on the part, while *A Nightmare on Elm Street*'s Heather Langenkamp will also appear.

Fans of *The Walking Dead* will have the opportunity to put themselves right in the middle of the walker apocalypse when a permanent attraction comes to Universal Studios Hollywood this summer. The live-action experience will find fans wandering a world inhabit-

ed by the undead, complete with "nightmarish iconic landscapes that bring the most popular cable TV show in history to life."

Gummy-winning actor Larry Drake died March 17, at age 66, in Hollywood as a result of various undisclosed health issues. Though mainstream audiences know him best as Benny on the long-running NBC drama *L.A. Law*, genre fans remember him for his role as Quentin

in Sam Raimi's 1990 film *Darkman* and its 1994 sequel, as the title character in *Dr. Giggles* (1992) and as Duke in the 1981 TV movie *Dark Night of the Scarecrow*.

Edurno Sanchez, one of the co-directors of *The Blair Witch Project*, has signed up to direct *Saw* sequel *Saw VI* (2016). While the movie's plot is being kept quiet, word is that it's a micro-budget production, which would keep it in line with Sanchez's iconic found-footage film. The director has recently been directing ep-

sodes of *Freaky Dusk* (a Down for It) on Netflix and BBC America's *The Architects*.

The long-gestating remake of Dario Argento's classic giallo *Suspense* looks to be moving forward, with some notable names attached to the project. According to a report from film critic Alex Heller-Wohl, director Luca Bolognini has revealed that both *Fifty Shades of Grey*'s Dakota Johnson and Oscar-winning actress Tilda Swinton have been tapped to star in the film, which will be set in 1977 Berlin.

The *Walking Dead* creator Robert Kirkman's new television offering *Outcast* has already made waves behind the scenes, months ahead of its June 3 premiere. The series has been given the green light for a second season on Comcast, demonstrating the network's expectations for its success. Based on Kirkman's image comic book of the same name, *Outcast* stars Patrick Fugit as Doyle Barnes, a man plagued by demonic possession who sequesters himself away from society to avoid hurting his loved ones.

ANDY BURNS

MONSTRO BIZARRO

According to sources at *McGill's St. Catharines' oldest First Nations' newspaper*, a fisheries officer may have spotted a sasquatch during a recent patrol of Alouabik territories in British Columbia. The young man was in a boat when he "saw a creature stand up from a crouched position and retreat deeper into the forest." Shaken, he reported the incident to a group of locals who returned with him to the area the following morning. Upon searching they discovered ten footprints that measured 16 inches (40 cm) long and 7 to 9 inches (18 to 23 cm) wide. Toes were clearly visible, said a member of the group who was present. The Alouabik tribal territories are located on the west coast of Vancouver Island. The area has a long history of Bigfoot reports by both natives and early settlers.

LYLE BLACKBURN

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CORONER'S REPORT

WEIRD STATS & MORBID FACTS

PRICE: \$1.66

A 40-year-old Romanian woman allegedly tore off her husband's testicles on International Women's Day after he suggested to buy her flowers or help with the housework.

The iconic Randy's Donuts chain (seen in multiple movies and TV shows) was named after Phantom creator Dan Coscarelli's brother-in-law.

As of press time the town of Hall, Michigan, is for sale for USD \$200,000.

Kate Holmes (Jabroni Legend) was offered the title role on TV's Buffy the Vampire Slayer, but ultimately turned it down so she could attend high school.

Dutch citizen Jacobus van Herpo, whom the European media has nicknamed the "Dentist of Horror," went on trial in France in March for allegedly removing the healthy teeth of dozens of his patients at his rural French practice. He also left some of his victims with broken jaws and serious infections after performing unnecessary procedures on them.

In the current season of *The Walking Dead*, when Carl and Maggie find themselves captured by Saviors and locked up in their hideout, the first room they are put in is the same room that the bulk of the original *Saw* movies took place in.

A Taliban-born British man was arrested in Bangkok in March after six dead, gold-level covered fetuses were found in his luggage. Certain groups in Taliban (and parts of China) believe that the fetuses are good luck charms which will bring wealth and prosperity.

Following country singer Patsy Cline's death in a plane crash in 1963, hundreds of people swarmed the wreckage, stealing souvenirs. One news report at the time even claimed someone made off with the severed foot of one of the other victims.

Werner Stocke died in 1986 after he bit off part of a man's ear during a bar fight in Bremen, Germany, and subsequently choked to death on it.

Glen Morgan, who co-wrote the notorious *X-Files* episode "Hesse" about the Inbred Prozac family, was inspired in part by a section in Charlie Chaplin's memoir in which the actor describes a delamated, legless man he once encountered emerging from under a disaster.

A group of two dozen men shows up to their A1649 rental in Palaiseau, France, in February only to discover a woman in an advanced state of decomposition lying in the home's garden. The police investigation is continuing.

Finnish actor Lari Pääkkönen's fascination with the mythical woodcutter creature, which has been featured in several of his movies, began in part when his mother crept him out with woodcutter sounds when he was a child.

More people are killed by Hippos in Africa each year than by any other large animal, including lions.

COMPILED BY KENNETH S. KREMER
FOR A WEIRD STAT OR MORBID FACT, SEND IT TO: weirdstats@bitchmedia.com

BODY HORROR

EVIL KITTY

ARTIST: Niala Kayes (@nialakayes, @nialakayesart)

"I generally draw my inspiration from interesting myself in art. I have an entire room in my house with 'told-off' spiffed walls called 'the horror room,' which includes life-sized horror characters and over 1000 horror toys and collectibles. I love doing dark tattoos and try to do as many horror pieces as I can."

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THE RUC MORGUE SICK TOP SIX

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2. **PHANTASM III**
GOLD DRB GRINDS UP GRAYER
3. **PHANTASM III: LORD OF THE DEAD**
HOLE IN THE HEAD FOR THE UNDEAD
4. **PHANTASM IV: OBLIVION**
JENNIFER'S BIG SHINY BREASTS
5. **PHANTASM**
MAUSOLEUM HENDRICKSON BLOOD AND BLADDER SPLATTER
6. **PHANTASM: RAVAGER**
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tall. The small- and medium-sized dolls can be found on eBay for \$7 to \$15 apiece, while the large ones will for around \$40.

JAMES BURNELL



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WITH ITS FINAL CHAPTER AND THE DEATH OF THE ACTOR WHO PLAYED ITS ICONIC VILLAIN, ONE OF HORROR'S MOST LOVED FRANCHISES BIDS A FOND FAREWELL. FITTINGLY, NEITHER **PHANTASM: RAVAGER** NOR THE STORY BEHIND IT IS AT ALL CONVENTIONAL



EXIT THE TALL MAN

BY JOHN W. BOWEN

ON THE SURFACE, IT'S ALMOST INCONCEIVABLE: A HIGHLY POPULAR INDEPENDENT HORROR FILM FRANCHISE WHO'S COMPOSED OF ONLY FIVE FILMS RELEASED SPORADICALLY OVER THE COURSE OF 37 YEARS. Had they

arrived at regular intervals, this would have meant a sequel every 7.4 years! The production budget peaks — by a considerable margin — on the second film, already diminishing thereafter to the point where the first film is shot largely guerrilla-style with a skeleton crew (a maximum of ten people on set at any given time) for less than a half-million dollars, despite the fact that the franchise remains as popular (read: profitable) as ever. Why? Because the series creator — one of the most respected indie filmmakers working today — simply couldn't get the funding.

Inconceivable, yes, but here's the strangest part of all: Although rolls and adjustments were being made as recently as last summer and the official announcement of its impending release came not long after, principal photography actually began in 2010 — before cameras rolled on Don Coscarelli's 2012 film *John Dies at the End* — and wrapped more than two years ago. In a world where scripts and sometimes even entire films are leaked online months before their scheduled release, the very existence of *Phantasm*? *ReVigor* was still barely a rumour at this time last year. Inconceivable? Absolutely. But in the world of *Phantasm*, both on screen and behind the scenes, the only certainty is that nothing is certain.

After all, the series story arc — in which three reluctant heroes spend their lives (and in some cases afterwards) doing battle with a time-travelling, dimension-jumping, shape-shifting grave robber — is hardly conventional, and several generations of Phans wouldn't have it any other

way. *ReVigor*'s returning protagonists, Mike Pearson (J. Michael Hillberg), his brother Jody (Bill Thornberry) and their friend Reggie (Peggy Bernink) may lack the instant recognition factor of Ash or Leone Shado, but they've been held near and dear by the series' rabid following for more than three and a half decades. *ReVigor* also features the return of enigmatic femme fatale the Lady in Lavender (Kat Lester), a figure of endless Phans speculation, for the first time since the 1979 original. At the cold, dark heart of it all, Angus Scrimm — one of the last true icons of horror cinema — returns for a final glower in his signature role as the Tall Man.

ReVigor's predecessors *Phantasm II: Lord of the Dead* (1984) and *Phantasm III: Hell on Wheels* (1988) saw the Reggie character emerge from sidekick to co-lead, but the new film is the first to be told entirely from his point of view. After several misadventures in the opening scenes, our aging hero finds himself in a mental health facility, diagnosed with dementia and unsure which of his seemingly parallel lives is the real one. After some soul-searching, he decides that his "delusions" may hold some grain of truth and soon joins likes old and new for a final showdown with the Tall Man.

In another departure from the norm (or as close as this series gets to one), *ReVigor* marks the first time a *Phantasm* film has been directed by an outsider — David Hartman, a long-time associate who worked with Coscarelli in various capacities on *Robo H-Tep*, *John Dies at the End* and the *Masters of Horror* episode *Incident On and Off a Mountain Road* — but Phans can rest

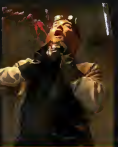
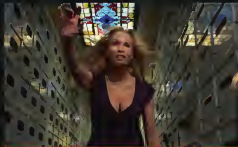
assured that Coscarelli himself remained integral to the project as producer and co-writer. The film's long, strange evolution, from a low-profile short to a projected web series to a feature film, is unique in horror history, as Hartman and Coscarelli detail in our interview.

The imminent release of *ReVigor* has the filmmakers, their cast and Phans everywhere caught up in a combination of excitement and relief, but two issues have cast something of a pall over the proceedings. Hartman has been hospitalized off and on since last fall with a persistent pelvic ailment which, though not life-threatening, has siphoned much of his work and left him drained of energy. Then, on the evening of January 8, word went around that Angus Scrimm had died earlier that day at the age of 83 after a sharp decline in health over the last year. Scrimm's loved ones and Phans worldwide can take at least some solace in the knowledge that he was able to see the film late last summer just after ending wound down.

ReVigor's release follows on the heels of another momentous event for Phans: the unveiling of a meticulous restoration of the original *Phantasm* (see p. 21), personally supervised by the latest scums in Hollywood, J.J. Abrams, and his Bad Robot post-production crew. Following *ReVigor*'s premiere in Los Angeles later this month, Coscarelli is taking both features on a summer-long promotional tour he's describing as a "Phantasm roadshow." *ReVigor* speaks with Hartman and Coscarelli as plans for the tour are being finalized.



PHANTASM



Phan Club: *The Lady in Lavender* (Kat Lester) returns to the franchise in classic *Phantasm* red and yellow; Angus Scrimm as the Tall Man

LET'S BE TOTALLY CLINÉ AND START AT THE BEGINNING

Don Coscarelli: Dave said, "Let's go out this weekend and shoot a short *Phantasm* movie."

David Hartman: Something he could throw onto a DVD as an Easter egg, a fun little five-minute thing, and it would help me to get something on my reel that was a little more straight horror.

DC: He said, "I have an idea—Reggie meets this girl." So we shot the scene on the road where he picks up this girl. We had so much fun. We started at Dave's house with his wife, who helped put the costumes on. My wife had done the costuming, so the two of them stayed there. Then we went out to the road—me, Dave, Reggie, [actress] Gawn Cody, my friend Brad, my son Andy and [Reggie Bannister's wife] Gig, so it was like seven people to shoot that entire scene over a weekend and it was so much fun! Freedom, having a good time, no pressure other than dodging cars because we didn't have any permits. So we finish up and I come over there Monday to look at the material. Reggie's got a cabin in the mountains, so the next weekend we go up there—some thing, about six, seven people shooting all that entire stuff in Reggie's actual house—again, so much fun. Then we come home, take a few weeks off, then start coling it together. We did that for a number of weekends with those early scenes until we had about twenty minutes of material, and then kind of went, "Okay, it's gonna end with this idea where Reggie's going to come to the end of the cave and there it would be the Tall Man's planet, with 10,000 dwarves looking up at him." And that's where this two-

ty-minute short would end. So we finished that—no Angus, no Mike, no Bill—and then for about a year we were going, "What are we going to do with this?"

DC: We put the thing together and were like, "This is pretty cool—why don't we do another one?" And next thing you know, "Well, we've got another. Let's do a web series."

DC: We started looking around for a way to put it out, some website or whatever, and there's nothing. We didn't spend that much money but we thought we could get that money back. It was ridiculous. By then it was 2010 and we figured we have to get Angus into this thing. So we wrote two scenes and we shot them in Dave's kitchen, put it together and by then we had a 30-minute thing. Then it was time to make John Oles of the First Dave was helping me on that and Brad was the producer. We went away for those two years.

"WHEN WE BROUGHT IN A HIRED GUN, LIKE A MAKEUP ARTIST OR WHATEVER, WE DIDN'T TELL THEM IT WAS *PHANTASM*."
—DON COSCARELLI

Then when John Oles was done, we thought, "What are we gonna do with this stuff?"

RND THAT WAS WHEN THE DECISION WAS MADE TO GO FULL-LENGTH?

DC: At first, we were just shooting on weekends, while Dave was getting John Oles at the End started and I was producing and directing the *Translucence* TV show, so we both had full-time gigs going on. But once we said, "Let's make this a feature," it got more serious. We started shooting it like one. And that's where Don, as producer, really came in and kicked ass and got us some great locations. Then we weren't just filming every weekend. We took some time off from the other jobs.

DC: That's what we did in 2013, then did visual effects in 2014 and 2015, and here we are!

THERE'S AN HUGE POPULAR AMONG COWBOYS. "DANCE CAN KEEP A SECRET IF TWO ARE DANCE." PEOPLE ARE REALLY MARVELLING AT THE WAY YOU KEPT IT GOING ON THIS THING FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS AFTER PRINCIPAL PHOTOGRAPHY HAD WRAPPED, AND YET THE TWO OF YOU DIDN'T REALLY SEEM TO THINK THAT WAS SUCH A BIG DEAL.

DC: There were usually six or seven people there. On our biggest day we might have had ten and a lot of times we had five including the actors. When we brought in a hired gun, Mike a makeup artist or whatever, we didn't tell them it was *Phantasm*. I had an email last week from the gal who did a bare makeup effect. I thought, it was great and she wanted to use a clip of it in her [promo reel]. She said, "Yeah, I worked with you a year and a half ago on that short film."



Tangling With The Tall Man, Reggie (Reggie Bannister) gears up for a fight

ANGUS SCRIMM'S CO-STARS REMEMBER THE MAN BEHIND
THE SCOWLING FACE OF THE PHANTASM MOVIES

REQUIEM FOR THE TALL MAN

BY JOHN W. BOWEN



WITH THE DEATH OF ANGUS SCRIMM THIS YEAR, THE PHANTASM FAMILY LOST THE FACE OF ITS FRANCHISE.

Scrimm (July 2, Harry Gay, August 19, 1929 – January 9, 2016) was as gentlemanly in real life as he is menacing in the movies as the Tall Man. Known for his warmth and wit off screen, he remained especially close with his fellow *Phantasm* cast members, who share some reminiscences.



MICHAEL BADWYN ("Mike Pearson," *Phantasm*, *Phantasm II: Lord of the Dead*, *Phantasm Revenge*) Of all the cast members [on *Cosmo*!]'s second film, *Kenny and Company*] at that time, I was the only one who had already acted professionally as a child, and to be a professional [adult] actor was my goal, so when I met Angus I made it a real point to try to—in a very adult way—tell him how much I had enjoyed his performance, because I thought he was great. I guess I had some vision in my mind of how this was "actor-to-actor" [laughs], telling him how much I liked him. It was all very nice, and he was very gracious, 'cause that was his nature.



KATE LISTER ("The Lady in Lavender," *Phantasm*, *Phantasm II: Lord of the Dead*, *Phantasm Revenge*) When I met Rory it was in the midst of shooting *Phantasm* and we hit it off immediately, and a lot of it was because we both had a great reverence for Shakespeare. He told me that even though he was a trained Shakespearean actor, he was really getting a kick out of developing and playing the villain character. And I have to say, it was just astounding to witness firsthand this kind, self-aware, gentle man transform into this demonic entity without the use of prosthetics.

REGGIE BARNHART ("Reggie," *Phantasm*, *Phantasm II: Lord of the Dead*, *Phantasm Revenge*) That night, *Real House* thing he was so good at, would just scare the hell out of you. There's a lot to be said about really physical acting, and if you're going to act your whole life there comes a time when maybe you're not capable of it anymore. But to the very end, he really brought it in. *Revenge*,

we were face-to-face in that one scene—it is scary to watch, and it was scary to be that close to the Tall Man. Because it wasn't Angus, it was the Tall Man.



BILL THORNBURY ("Jody Pearson," *Phantasm*, *Phantasm II: Lord of the Dead*, *Phantasm Revenge*) On *Offspring*, I took [my son] Ben out of school and took him to the eastern side of the Sierras where we shot on location in a town called Lone Pine. That's where he really bonded with Rory. There wasn't a meeting or any time together that Rory didn't want to know how Ben was doing. I've got pictures of Ben sitting on his lap, making faces, pulling on the mean face like the Tall Man. He really cared about Ben, and that was one of the things about Rory that I loved. He truly did care about others.

KATE The last time I saw him get up on stage, it was in Chicago—he went up to sing! Bill and Reggie and I were scheduled to sing and Rory said, "I want to sing too!" So everyone said, "Of course!" And I didn't even know how he was going to get up on that stage, but you know, when it was time for him to perform he summoned not only the energy, but his wit, his mannerisms, his manner of speech, his eloquence just blew me away. Blew everybody away. I was constantly amazed by this man.

BILL We were together in Dallas in May of last year and were supposed to be together again in Lexington, Kentucky, in October and I found out as I was walking into the event that he wasn't well enough to make the trip. And was kind of knew.



REGGIE He just kind of faded a little at a time—he was around him a lot. It was almost unnoticeable until the very end. Phone conversations with him were always brilliant, though, even in the end. He remembered every detail of everything he ever did.

MICHAEL It was just a fact that during certain periods in my life, when I needed a friend, I had one in Angus Scrimm—in Rory Gay—my old buddy. And I'm sure going to miss him.



Sphere *Reborn* When *James Cameron* visits an aging Regge at a medical health facility and finds a ghost of his eyes inside a city

"WHEN THE WHOLE CAST WAS INVOLVED, THAT'S WHEN IT FELT TO ME LIKE WE WERE DOING *PHANTASM*."
— DAVID HARTMAN

She doesn't even know, to this day. We finally put that trailer out so we didn't have that secret hanging over us anymore.

DC: It came down to being a small crew shooting on weekends, people Doe had worked with in the past or people I brought in that I'd worked with before. And it's the usual non-disclosure agreement and all that. But that nothing was ever leaked, because every now and then somebody would accidentally put a photo up online or there'd be some talk, but then it would just kind of disappear.

ANY PARTICULAR EXAMPLES YOU CAN CITE WHERE A SCENE OR PLOT POINT STARTED WITH ONE PERSON AND THE OTHER DEVELOPED IT?

DC: We were just editing scenes at the very beginning of this thing, when it was still a web series idea, before we'd even considered it as a

movie, and he said "You know what'd be great? I'd love to get the 'Cute back in this. What if we did something with the 'Cute?' I said, 'Ah, I've always wanted to see the sphere chasing the 'Cute.' An idea would start like that and Don would say, 'Alright, go write a beat sheet.' Pretty much all of it at the very beginning was like that. But when this turned into a [feature-length] movie we got tougher on ourselves. We had to be pretty ruthless, for the sake of the characters and the story itself, about some scenes that we both spent a lot of time on and were proud of. There are a lot of deleted scenes taken out for the sake of the story that I hope people will eventually get to see [on home video].

IT'S ONE THING TO GO OUT AND SHOOT SCENES WITH ANGUS SERRAVALLO, KAT-ASSER AND REGGIE BARNISTER, BUT WHAT ABOUT EDITING SCENES BRUNDA (NOW 36 YEARS OLD) AND OLD-HEADS?

ON FRESHIE (A RECAP?)

DC: Well, as a fan I really wanted both those guys. Once it turned into a film, they had to be in it. That was when everything started getting real. Michael is just such an exceptional actor, very intense, in the greatest way possible. It was such a pleasure — I was so excited — to get to work with both Michael and Bill. When the whole cast was involved, that's when it felt to me like we were doing *Phantasm*. That's when the butterflies start in the stomach and you start second-guessing everything [laughs]. I'm thankful not just to Don but to the whole cast for even accepting me — an outsider — all of a sudden deciding roles for characters they'd played for 30 years.

ASIDE FROM THE ONGOING JOY-AND-BEER STRUGGLE WITH THE TAILOR, REGGIE IS BURNING POWERING HIS OWN MORTUARY IN A MORE CONVENTIONAL SENSE IN THIS FILM — COMING TO GRIPS WITH ENCODING OLD REGGIE. TELL ME A BIT ABOUT HOW THAT IDEO EVOLVED.

DC: I guess ever since *Bubble Ho-Top* — or even going back to the original *Phantasm* — I've been obsessed with death, dying and me, and the inevitable despondency which creeps up on all of us. Those are themes that I've been exploring for a long time. Way before this ever started, years and years ago, there was a long-range idea. "You know, one day, in one of these sequels, Reggie's gonna be in a wheelchair [laughs] for a whole movie!" I thought that would be interesting — he could even have a kicked-out wheelchair with some wisponny — but I never did anything with it. It's a wonderful solution to our quandary — basically not to stay away from how old Reggie is, and I feel like this was it: glumate and artistic, [the idea] that he's having flashbacks. Why? Because he's losing his own sanity. Alzheimer's is in the news all the time and we have friends and neighbors who, on a daily basis, get diagnosed with this terrible affliction. It just seemed appropriate based on our circumstances.

DC: What I'd always liked about the film was the social, challenge-tissue feel of each one where the next picks up where the last one left off, almost in real time. But with this one being so long after the last film I didn't want to think that — don't want to play that the actors are younger than they are. And just with me dealing with my own health issues and Don having done *Bubble Ho-Top*, there was something really moving about that, with the Reggie character and the old-age aspect of things. And remember, we didn't start this thing writing a full script. We shot it kind of the way Doe did the first film, here and there, and then we built it up. So that aspect just kind of worked its way in. We had elements of "Is Reggie going to get the girl?" and then, "Man, he's like twice her age!" [laughs]. So we kind of had fun with it. Reggie's still tryin'!

IT'S FUNNY HOW REGGIE'S ATTEMPTS TO GET LADY—AND THE CROWD GOES WILD! REGGIE—HAVE ENDED INTO THIS REPLAYING GAG.

Dit: [laughs] Really, you've got to wonder if that's where most of his frustrations come from. Maybe he would have beaten the Tall Man a long time ago if he'd just gotten laid!

SPEAKING OF WHICH, DOWN ISLY IS A WORTHY ADDITION TO THE COLLECTION OF REGGIE'S UNFORGETTABLE QUOTE-GIRLS.

Dit: I'd known her for years... she was an actress I kept coming back to—I really liked her a lot. We had a meeting to see if there was chemistry with her and Reggie, and they did some great test readings together and got along great. So really, she was my first pick, and she nailed it. And I don't think Phantasm had a redubbed yet!

DAWN ROSENBLATT'S BENEATH THE TONGUE-CLIPPING FETTERED WAS A RATHER UN-SPANNED CHARACTER (BEFORE ANOTHER).

Dit: Back at the web series stage we were just talking about having a love-hand-for [Dawn's character], and the necessity of having some people to kill. Then I met Don and I told Don, "Let's make this part for him, and make the guy Bulgarian!" At the time I was working at Disney and one of my friends there was Bulgarian and he'd just come to the US to work half the year and then go back to Bulgaria. I was like, "Hey, I'll write the script and have him translate it for me." Then we wrote it down phonetically on cue cards for Don, but when he came in he'd memorized it all! I have no idea if he said it correctly so maybe anyone who actually knows Bulgarian will just roll their eyes and go, "This is a mess!" But I'll give Don the benefit of the doubt [laughs] I'm sure some will like it and some will hate it. Some of it was comic relief, but some was out of necessity to just make things difficult for Reggie—throw in another character to put him into this predicament, 'cause they can't communicate with each other and they're both pretty defensive [laughs].

OF COURSE THERE'S NOW A GOOD—ALBERT UNWENTONAL—RESPONSE TO THE OLD-FACE THEME WITH HAVING LOST REGGIE RECENTLY.

Dit: It was a terrific blow. Sometimes it's not until you lose someone that you realize how meaningful they were to your life. Angus was the first adult actor I ever worked with—I met him when I

WITH J.J. ABRAMS' 4K REVAMP OF THE ORIGINAL PHANTASM, IT'S A WHOLE NEW GAME, BOYYYY...

REVISIT, RESTORE, REANIMATE

BY JOHN W. BOWEN

THE RESTORATION OF ANY CLASSIC HORROR FILM IS A BEAUTIFUL THING, but seldom have we encountered a filmmaker so giddily enthused about the process as Don Coscarelli is over *Bad Robot's* new 4K refurbishment of the original 1979 *Phantasm*, personally supervised by J.J. Abrams and his post-production staff.

"About a dozen years ago," Coscarelli recalls, "I was finishing up editing on *Jubilee* (Ri-Rip) and a TV producer named J.J. Abrams just called me and introduced himself because he was such a major fan. We stayed in contact as years went by, and obviously his career skyrocketed between the *Lost* and *Alias* TV shows. I introduced him to Angus Scrimm and they became fast friends. J.J. actually gave Angus a recurring role in *Alias*, and every year he'd send Angus a big gift basket on his birthday."

The idea of restoring the film evolved rather unexpectedly. A couple of years ago Abrams called Coscarelli "out of the blue" because he wanted to screen *Phantasm* for his employees. He was surprised to learn that the film had never been upgraded to HD. Coscarelli informed him that the distribution license on the movie was meaning an end, so it would likely be years before someone else decided to release another version.

"He basically said, 'We can't have that! I'm gonna have my head of post-production, Ben Rosenblatt, see if he has any ideas on how to expedite this,'" remembers Coscarelli. "Ben wanted to do a frame scan restoration from the original camera negative, so I went to our long-term storage vault personally because I was so nervous about this negative, and hand-delivered it to that lab."

Over the next year, Rosenblatt and his team worked on *Phantasm* in fits and starts between *Bad Robot's* bread-and-butter projects, such as *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*. Every once in a while Coscarelli would get a phone call informing him that another five minutes had been done. It was clear that the restoration was going to take some time.

"There was so much negative damage on the original material, damage that was actually in the print we were watching back in 1979, that [now] got completely cleaned up," explains Coscarelli.

It was really exciting for me to be able to see the movie in such a clear fashion. Here I was, 35 years later, looking at this original camera negative that actually had been shot well and exposed well with excellent cameras and lenses but had been the victim of some sloppy lab work over the years and

sloppy helicine—some of the VHS versions were really bad."

The filmmaker was "shocked" at how much was revealed through the process (example below). One scene in particular was given new weight.

"When Angus is heading the casket by himself and stuffing it into the hearse, it's creepy," exclaims Coscarelli. "I never knew it was raining, but now you can see it. So when I was making readjustments to the soundtrack I had to put a little thunder and rain [sound effect], which actually heightens that scene."

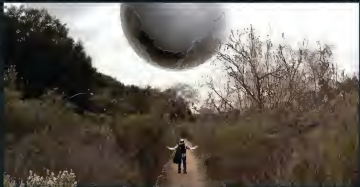
On the flipside, the restoration also revealed new flaws that had to be dealt with.

"In a museum scene there's an ornate yellow bucket sitting there as Mike, Lady and Reggie are about to go into the space gate room, so we had to digitally erase the bucket," says Coscarelli.

Abrams wasn't satisfied with any overhauling *Phantasm's* visuals, however. Coscarelli soon learned that his commitment to the restoration project was all-encompassing.

"I was over there one afternoon walking through the *Bad Robot* offices and J.J. just appears out of nowhere and says, 'What about audio? What are you gonna do about the audio?' I go, 'Well, the sound's not bad. We did do a stereo version of it a while back which is pretty decent.' He says, 'Oh no. We restored the video, we need to do the audio.' So they basically tore all the tracks apart and built it back up from scratch and enhanced some things and it just sounds marvelous now. The music has never sounded more glorious. I'm so excited!"





You Got Some Balls... Angus, Mike and director Joss Whedon (right) look the Tall Man in an abandoned building, and Joss Whedon carries the Tall Man with a jiggly sphere

was eighteen years old, when we did *Jiro the World's Greatest*. I've shared some incredible highs and successes with him and also some low moments, some moments of failure. Despite his onscreen persona, as everybody knows, he was a kind, gentle, sweet, intelligent man with a great sense of humour and an encyclopaedic knowledge of both music and film, and the film business. He turned me onto so many classic directors and actors. He'd originally been an usher in a movie theatre when he was in his teens, back in the late '30s and early '40s, so he really knew those movies.

DB: It really makes a lot of stuff in *Reverie* very poignant. We watched the movie in a screening theatre with Angus, and when I drove him home afterward we had this hour-long talk about life in general, and mortality. Really, a heavy discussion after watching it, and it just impressed me so much that the movie inspired him to have

this conversation with me. So, for me, it's a very wonderful thing to watch the film now — hard to watch — with the connection to Angus and our history.

DB: I realized the other day that usually on Fridays he'd call me in the afternoon, because he was a late riser, and bring me up to speed on what he was up to — you know, any time he went to a horror convention or any time he went back to New York to star in a Larry Fessenden Glass Eye Pix movie, he'd call me up and give me the blow-by-blow of who he met with and how every scene went, how the director treated him, what the fans had told him at the convention. We'd talk about various things in the *Phantom* world, people's careers. It's sad to think that he's never going to call me on Fridays again to tell me what he's up to. He was just wonderful and kind and really part of the family, and I'll miss him to my dying day.

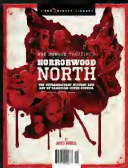
YOU STILL OWN THE RIGHTS AND HENCE RETAIN CONTROL, BUT THIS IS OFFICIALLY THE END OF YOUR INVOLVEMENT WITH PHANTOM AS A DIRECTOR, AND THE LAST CHAPTER IN THE SERIES. PROPER. HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT ANY OUTSIDE CONTINUATION?

DC: As long as it's done with some level of legitimacy, I'd love to see a *Phantom* with a young Michelle instead of a young Mike, having a female lead. It'd be fun to see a thinking man's television series made from it by someone who took it really seriously.

HOW HARD IS IT TO STEP AWAY FROM TAKING PHANTOMS OVER SUCH A LONG RUN?

DC: Well, how many *Phantom* movies can one man direct in a lifetime? [laughs] I think four is a pretty decent number! Working with Dave was a great transition for me because Dave's super collaborative, super nice, a good pal and was open to any thoughts I had. And I was always very interested in seeing how he wanted to do it. It was just a great relationship. He didn't care if I was there while he was working. Sometimes it was a little bit of a challenge because I know these actors. Sometimes when one of them might give him a little grief I was being my 'torque' [laughs] to not just jump in and say, "Just tell him to get in there and do the scene and don't ask any questions!" But that was Dave's job and I let him do that. The weird part about this franchise is that I'm a big fan of the Tall Man; I'm a big fan of Reggie and Mike and Jody and the Lady in Lavender, so as long as they stay pretty much true to those characters, I'd be excited to see future generations, future versions of them — and would enjoy seeing them — if there were any more. But there's no question, I feel like I've run my course. ♥

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FIFTY YEARS AGO, BOUNDARY-PUSHING COMPANION FILMS *THE PLAGUE OF THE ZOMBIES* AND *THE REPTILE* CHANGED THE VERY NOTION OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE HAMMER HORROR

CURSE of CORNWALL

by Jeff Spurgeon

THE WORDS "HAMMER HORROR" IMMEDIATELY CONJURE UP IMAGES OF CHRISTOPHER LEE AND PETER CUSHING

in period costume on lavish gothic sets amidst monsters and women with heavy cleavage. More esoteric fans of the legendary British genre studio will certainly smile at another term: "Cornish Duo," which refers to a pair of unconventional shockers without Lee or Cushing that stand out in the Hammer canon.

Both helmed by the late studio maverick John Gilling, *The Plague of the Zombies* and *The Reptile* introduced a pair of novel monsters to the UK horror scene—a new type of zombie and a snake woman, respectively. And although the movies are celebrating their 50th anniversaries, they're both imbued with themes that still resonate strongly today.

At their core, *Plague* and *The Reptile* play upon a pervasive paranoia concerning outsiders infiltrating established, homogenous communities. As su-



that Bryan Smith wrote in his 2007 book *A Year of Fear*, in both movies "exotic foreign devilry invades a rural English village to spawn monsters that dominate the atmospheric locale." Both films look heroes, villains, locals and monsters within the confines of Cornwall, an isolated chunk of rugged terrain in southwest England. This wild, unspoiled locale has long drawn the interest of both gothic writers and horror filmmakers, leading to the term "Cornish Gothic."

"That term was first coined in 1988 by Avril Homer and Sas Zisook in relation to the work of Daphne du Maurier," says Dr. Ruth Heholt, a lecturer at Falmouth University in Cornwall, who recently gave talks on both films and is in the process of preparing a paper for the publication *Gothic Localities*. "There are quite a few gothic fictions set in Cornwall and I came across the Hammer films quite early in my research. I love Hammer and these films are really useful in the way they portray Cornwall as a gothic location but also in the representation of the Cornish people themselves. — Even early tourist literature emphasized Cornwall's wildness and remoteness, selling it as a land of 'weird and magic.' Cornwall is told and imagined as exotic, wild and steeped in lore and legend." (See sidebar for more on Cornish Gothic.)

The lure of Cornwall is so strong that Hammer set *Plague* and *Requiem* there but actually shot them in its Bray Studios in Berkshire, west of London (hours away from Cornwall), where many of the company's films were leased. It allowed Hammer to create its own mythic version of the fabled area. The studio had its own unique aesthetic, as well.

"Bray was almost an anachronism in its way," recalls actor John Carson (Hammer's Captain Knoxx and Tyke the Blood of Dracula), who starred as the villain in *Plague*. "It was a converted mansion. It was not a purpose-built studio like Babels, Pinewood, Shepperton and places like that. That's what gave it its charm. And it also gave it an intimacy. Everyone I've talked to since enjoyed working there. Personal dogs were generally never allowed on set, but I had a Golden Labrador at the time, whose name was Chaplin. He used to come to Bray with me on *Plague*. The problem was getting the crew not to feed him. They never knew when to stop! That kind of family atmosphere sort of typified Bray."



Mid-Cornish To Cornwall: (clockwise from top) Squire Gile Hamilton (John Carson, right) gives blood in *The Plague of the Zombies*, remote locale Charles Eddowes (David Frank) in *The Requiem*, and an exotic zombie in *Plague* (Ben Aray) comes off Alice (Kay Tomlin) (unpublished France)

In the mid-1960s, Hammer was in its heyday. But even then it was a challenge to keep Bray running in the black. Fans regard the studio warmly for its historical significance, of course, but in reality it was a troubled endeavour.

"The uncomfortable truth is that it was a millstone around Hammer's neck and it was difficult for them to keep it open because it had a very large permanent staff and it was a huge drain on their resources," explains Hammer historian Marcus Hearn, author of *The Hammer Vault* and *Hammer Glamour*. By the 1960s, they had all but come to the conclusion that Bray was unsustainable. The Cornish Duo represents part of a last-ditch effort to keep the space viable.

So, in 1964, producer Anthony Nelson Keys proposed a cycle of four films shot back-to-back at Bray in an effort to save costs. These were *Dracula — Prince of Darkness*, *Requiem — The Mad Monk*, *The Plague of the Zombies* and *The*

Requiem. *Plague* and *Requiem* were the last two to be filmed in the 1965 shooting block, and were destined to be backed on as the second parts of double bills with *Prince of Darkness* and *Requiem*.

Plague is set in an isolated Cornish community whose leader, Squire Gile Hamilton (played with refined menace by Carson), is secretly conducting Heilston voodoo rituals to revive the dead as slave labour. His plan is challenged by two doctors, local men Peter Thompson (Brook Williams: *Where Eagles Dare*, *The Sea Wolves*), whose wife recently died in the village, and Sir James Forbes (Anirid Morell: *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, *Ben-Hur*), who arrives from outside the community with his daughter Sylvia (Blair Clark: *The Hauling*, *Witchcraft*).

"The villain is the fun part," says Carson of his role. "That's where you have the scope, the opportunity, you just need to step out to it and not

be frightened. To be able to step out into these parts is really enormous fun."

The low-budget production required him to do stunt work, as well.

"I was fortunate," recalls Carson, who grew up in Sri Lanka (and later Australia, during war-time), which gave him opportunities to learn horseback riding and develop an aptitude for the kind of stunt work that producers were looking for. "I was fit, could use a sword and ride even though I was an untalented and, at times, awful actor, and I got on well with the stunt guys.... But, specifically, the line scene [at the conclusion of] *Plague* was pretty hairy. Evie my dog got upset!"

Though edgy, the film is considered to be well-made, and influential to the next generation of filmmakers. Its sequence of the undead emerging from their graves is referenced in John Landis' video for Michael Jackson's "Thriller," while its beheading-by-show is echoed in Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead 2*. At the time, however, the film, like any horror movie, had an unglamorous reputation in Britain.

"We were born and bred in the theatre," says Carson. "In theatre you classed an actor by theatre, not by television and not by film. In fact, I'm ashamed to say that at the time it took British actors quite a while [to change that perspective]. We were snobby about American films, about American actors, because we were from the theatre. I'm overstating it but there was an element of that, which sounds awful. It was because that was the training and we didn't know.... I don't think Andre told his wife he was doing a Hammer film at the time. That is symptomatic of where we were coming from. You know, you don't do Hammer films if you're a theatre actor, and all that rubbish."

Plague also can be seen as a turning point for Hammer in terms of tone, as it took the studio into darker territory than in previous films. While Hammer's vibrant blood red is on full display, the decaying zombies are rendered with an earthiness that anticipates the graphic realism of George A.

Romero's *Night of the Living Dead*, which came two years later.

Gilling intended the film to push buttons in other ways, as well. In an interview for *Little Shoppe of Horrors* magazine (issue #23, from 1972), he stated, "It was my intent to [to suggest an incestuous relationship in *The Reptile*]. And I believe the relationship between father and daughter, which wasn't heavily underlined, came across that way."

Hammer acknowledges, "*Plague* in particular is one of the outstanding Hammer horrors. I don't know if it was a film that came along too late. It comes so far after the [traditional] Italian-style zombie films. Or did it come along just a bit too early? But it certainly stands out in the Hammer canon."

With only a one-week break between films, Gilling continued his rigorous schedule for *Reptile*. You can get a sense of the frantic pace that must have been going on by a close examination of the sets, which were reused and adapted by production designer Bernard Robinson. ("How these guys did their stuff on time and on budget is just to me absolutely remarkable," marvels Carson.)

The film features a similar plot to that of *Plague*, focusing on members of a Cornish community dying off from a mysterious plague. This time, the particular concern is Harry Spalding (Ray Barrett, *Thunderbolt*, Australia), who inherits a cottage and learns of the village's troubles. This leads him to the isolated manor of Dr. Franklin (Noel Wilson; *Dr. Zhivago*, *Kiss of the For-*

giveness), whose daughter (Jacqueline Pearce, also featured in *Plague*) has been cursed by a snake cult from Borneo that renders her with scabies, fangs and a venomous bite. Naturally difficult to work with,

Gilling agreed to make the movie under the studio's already strenuous conditions as long as he had control over the scripts.

"I was one of the few people who enjoyed working with John Gilling," says Carson. "John certainly didn't suffer fools gladly. I don't know why he suffered me, but he seemed to all right."

Under Gilling's watch, Pearce underwent significant makeup work by Hammer makeup artist Roy Ashton, becoming claustrophobically cloaked in a detailed mask that represents some of his finest work. As noted in Bruce Sachs' 2011 book *Greenspan and Gore*, he devised a special makeup model, "adapting the photo-like build-up of reptilian scales to the bones of the human head. There is a clear similarity of the human head to the structure of a snake's skull."

Hehrl notes the use of female monsters in both films as tapping into particular anxieties of the decade.

"The influential Women's Liberation Movement was beginning at this time," she points out. "The main monsters—Alice as zombie and Anna as snake—one female, with the infection embodied in them. These are deadly women who need to be eradicated in order to save 'civilization.'"

Both *Plague* and *Reptile* also represent more modern anxieties, however. The films have proven themselves timely in light of the terrorism-fueled Islamophobia growing worldwide, the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis that's putting pressure on First World leaders, and a particularly polarizing presidential race in the United States that's stoking xenophobic fears (Candidate Donald Trump, for example, has openly suggested walling up the border along Mexico and banning entry to all Muslims).

"I think one of the most interesting things about both films is their exploration of the idea of reversed colonization: the foreign coming into England," says Hehrl. "In relation to the migration crisis that



*Peacocks Perseus: Jacqueline Pearce, as Anna, shows off Ray Barrett's manor in *Reptile*. (over top) Sir James Pinch Montagu faces a zombie-like Alice in *Plague*.*

GOthic SCHOLAR AND CORNWALL RESIDENT RUTH HENOLD TELLS US WHY ENGLAND'S ISOLATED PENINSULA SIMPLY 'LENDS ITSELF TO DARKNESS'

SECRETS and RUINS

With Spynlass

WHEN IT COMES TO HORRIFIC LOCALES, THERE ARE PLENTY TO PICK FROM. But Cornwall, in England's "West Country," has been home to a disproportionate number of horror-themed books, television series and movies.

Its rugged landscape has set the tone for numerous genre stories. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes tale "The Adventure of the Devil's Foot" is set there, and Daphne du Maurier often used it as a literary backdrop, including for *The House on the Strand* and *The Birds*, which Alfred Hitchcock later adapted into a film.

The 1979 *Dracula* creature feature *The Giant Behemoth* (1966, pictured), Nicolas Roeg's *The Witches* (1990) and the British TV cult classic *The Nightmare Men* (1981) are all based there, as well. The reputation of "West Country" Cornwall from the rest of England, and the resultant tensions between locals and foreigners also famously set the tone for Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* (1971).

Cornwall resident and gothic scholar Ruth Henold explains the genesis of the unusual nature of the location, and its use in Hammer's films.

When you say that "Cornwall represents the anti-England within England," or "the foreign at home," I assume you're referring to how Cornwall is seen by the rest of the country. Is there something specific about Cornish culture that lends itself to this kind of viewpoint or marginalization, or are you thinking more along the lines of its specific geography?

Henold: "Early English (and perhaps only with its geographical location). Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries it was known as 'West Barbary,' referencing the African Barbary coast. Cornwall has never quite been seen as a part of England. However, for a short period during the industrialization of the 1800s it became more central. Cornwall was one of the first places in Britain to industrialize and steam power was invented here. Cornwall's mines provided much prosperity. However, in the mid-1900s the economy declined and there was what is referred to as 'the Great Migration' whereby Cornwall lost about a third of its population. Since then it has remained isolated and it is seen as remote. The industrial ruins are seen as part of the mysterious and romantic landscape.

Other than its unregimented beachfront, what makes Cornwall such a host of hidden secrets and 'otherness'?

Henold: "It's always been the imagination. It was, early on, identified as a gothic location and sold as such to the tourist market. The literature about Cornwall also continues this romanticization of place. Before Du Maurier presented us with a land of perils and secrets and romantic dark deeds, Bram Stoker, Arthur Conan Doyle and Wilkie Collins among others, represented Cornwall as exotic and mysterious. This is what Collins says about Cornwall: 'The grand and varied scenery, the mighty Druid

relics; the quaint legends; the deep, dark mines, the venerable remains of early Christianity, and the pleasant, primitive population [is] one of the remotest and most interesting corners of our old English soil.' Cornwall has secret and hidden caves and caves, deep mine workings and many ancient standing stones, particularly in the wild west of the county. The abandoned and ruined industrial buildings dotted around the sometimes bleak landscape look both melancholy and mysterious.

Cornish Doo wasn't filmed in Cornwall, but set there. However, a host of other genre movies that have been filmed in this part of the country, ranging from the Frank Langella *Dracula* to Hitchcock's *Rebecca*, and *Crucible of Terror*—what is it about Cornwall that attracts genre material?

Henold: "I think it is a combination of the type of landscape and the literary representation. As Cornwall was identified so early as a gothic location, using it as a background for horror fiction is perhaps inevitable. In relation to the rest of England, Cornwall is a harsh place to live and it has long been associated with an impoverished, isolated population as well as with such practices as piracy and wrecking. Cornwall has long been associated with violence, in its population but also in relation to the landscape and the weather and the sea. This means that Cornwall, in the imagination, lends itself to darkness, the gothic and to horror."





Dr. Franken Brain: The reptilian hero attacks Valerie Spelling Glenister (Cresset) in *Reptile*, and (top) Clive Francis (Cresset) vents his black rage on Sylvia Fielder (Shaw Davis) in *Plague*.

is occurring at the moment, as well as renewed interest in the gothic, I think both films resonate with current concerns."

Plague and *Reptile*'s iconic visuals significantly exploit classic horror movie fears of The Other, which are just as prevalent today as they were in post-WWI England.

"The monsters in these films are created by British colonial figures — Dr. Franklyn in *The Reptile* and Square Hamilton in *The Plague*, and they infiltrate Cresset, in effect as colonial immigrants," details Hobolt. "The immigration wave which began in the '50s was still occurring in the 1960s. There was a wave of post-war immigrants to Britain from the Caribbean in

particular and this caused tensions. There was also a backdrop of the decolonization of Africa. *The Plague* and *The Reptile*, as so often in horror films, reflect these tensions and fears. As you know the zombies and the snake-woman originate in Haiti and Malaysia. Malaysia had been granted independence from British rule in 1957 and was a part of the decolonization that was seeing Britain's decline in global influence and power. The 1960s were pervaded by a sense of absolute decline in imperial force and influence."

Hearn notes that those anxieties spread beyond the horror genre.

"Given [producer/screenwriter] Anthony Hinds' genuine interest in — and respect for — East-

ern culture, *The Reptile* represents aspects of post-colonial guilt. . . . Certainly it conforms with a theme that runs through a lot of English fiction of the time, which is a mistrust of foreigners. For example, all villains in James Bond films [of the era] are disfigured, and also foreign."

Because Gilling had more control over the Cornish Duo, the filmmaker was able to cover new ground while working off of scripts by Peter Bryan (*The Sliders of Dracula*, *Trogl* for *Plague*, and Hammer producer Anthony Hinds using the pseudonym "John Elder") for *Reptile*.

"They're both very unusual films," affirms Hearn. "[They're at] the lower end of Hammer's budgets, sometimes those are the places where more interesting things happen — the smaller films with less scouting."

Hammer would continue to film at Bray studios until *The Mummy's Shroud* in 1966, which was also directed by Gilling. Afterward, the company shifted gears and decided to film in bigger studios, such as Ealing. (Other famous productions took place at Bray after Hammer moved on, however, including 1975's *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* and 1979's *Alvin*, for its effects sequences involving miniatures.) In some ways, the Cornish Duo represents the last great gap of the original Hammer engine.

Importantly, despite the studio's reputation for titillation and, at times, camp appeal, *The Plague* of the Zombies and *The Reptile* showcase a company working under extreme budgetary constraints to come up with something that remains very unique to this day.

"It's just more cleavage and more blood, it may be good marketing, but it doesn't actually reel it in the public's conscience," says Carson. "For me, it's the whole mythical quality that gives [the movies] its grounding, its root, its substance." ☐

—RUE MORCUE—

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THE DOOM REBOOT SUMMONS BACK
THE TROOPS FOR MORE DEMON-FRAGGING MAYHEM

KILL 'EM ALL

BY BRITTANY VINCENT AND
MONICA S. KUEBLER

WHEN THE ORIGINAL DOOM WAS RELEASED IN 1993, WOLVES WERE SHAKEN. IT DELIVERED A BAA-RAISING

dose of device-slaying, first-person-shooter (FPS) junkies would later come to regard as the pinnacle of PC entertainment.

The game, which further refined the run-and-gun mechanics developer id Software introduced a year earlier in *Mulholland 3D*, proved hugely influential. It went on to spawn five sequels (1994's *Doom II: Hell on Earth* and 2004's *Doom 3* and five spin-offs (1996's *Final Doom*, 1997's *Doom 64*, 2000's *Doom RPG*, 2009's *Doom Resurrection* and *Doom II RPG*), not to mention a number of tie-in novels, a board game and even a 2005 feature film adaptation, directed by Andrzej Bartkowiak and starring Karl Linnar and Rosamund Pike.

Nearly 2000, rumors about *Doom 4* began to percolate, but development of the project was scuttled in 2013, when id Software announced that al-

though it was still focused on bringing a new *Doom* game to market, it had decided to turn its attention toward a reboot, as opposed to another sequel.

Enter 2016's *Doom* (out May 13 from Bethesda Softworks), a faithful reimagining that not only delivers on its promises, but also serves up balls-to-the-wall, adrenaline-fueled, demonic carnage. It's just like you remember it—but better. "We chose to go in a new direction with this *Doom*, narratively speaking," says Marty Stratton, executive producer for id Software. "Gameplay and combat have been our primary focus, but for those players interested in discovering more about the story, characters and world, we've tried to give you some answers, but also a lot to think about. . . . This has been our approach and I think it strikes a good balance between keeping story out of what you're there to do—which is kill demons—but allows players to look deeper."

Doom sees gamers cuffed in the metal-stained boots of a marine who's descended into the fiery depths of Hell in order to decimate the demons that

THE ART OF DOOM

Dark Horse

Nowadays, it's easier than ever to get a glimpse behind the scenes of your favorite movie, TV show or video game. Sometimes this material is supplied as "extras" on the official release, sometimes it's dumped into the Internet to serve as promotional material and sometimes it comes in the form of a companion book, as is the case with *The Art of Doom* (out June 23 from Dark Horse).

A brief one-page introduction opens the 187-page oversized tome and speaks to id Software's informal emphasis on teamwork in design and how it approached reworking *Doom* for both its long-time super fans and a brand new generation of gamers ("Characters like the original junky — with his oversized head, gaping maw, and squat T-Rex legs — showed us that we had to go big if we wanted to make the demons stand out as much as they did in the original," explains Marty Stratton and Hugo Martin, speaking on behalf of the *Doom* team).

This leads into first section, "Demons," which kicks off with a black-and-white 1800s-style historical overview of the game's demonic brethren and when it is believed the conflict with humanity began. The art featured here is largely comprised of monster sketches, line drawings and illustrations, as well as some 3-D physical mock-ups of the game's badasses. A significant number of the main sketches (such as the Mancubus, Harvester, Baron of Hell) get one- to few-paragraph spotlights that delve into their attributes, origins and strengths/weaknesses.

After "Demons," the book turns to "Environments" — a series of landscape and interior illustrations that are easily the highlight of the book. This section also includes informational blarney, but the game's fog-shrouded, heavy industrial atmosphere is more than well represented in the art. This section also includes some wonderfully startling imagery of strange, blood-dripping skeletal remains and the bizarre, rough stone-hewn, maze-strawed fortress of Hell.

The following two sections, "Characters" and "Weapons," spotlight the game's key good guys and snarling evil, of course, your arsenal and armory, while the final section "Props and Graphics" focuses primarily on mechanics, vehicles and Hell's artifacts and ruins.

The Art of Doom works well as a standard video game art book, but, for the uninitiated, it doesn't quite rise to the level of effective codex of the game's creatures, weapons and lore. All these things we certainly touched upon, but the level of fleshing out required to turn this into a must-have, all-encompassing volume is not quite there, making this far *Doom* delirious only.

MONICA S. KUEBLER

are invading Mars in hopes of exterminating humanity.

Long-time fans worried that more emphasis on storyline will change the fundamental experience of the game and not that. Though the current video game climate demands playing to audiences that greedily devour stop-and-go shooters such as *Gears of War* or online, open-world affairs such as *The Division*, id Software decided to hew close to *Doom*'s roots. As such, certain elements of the original game were incorporated into the reboot.

"Personality has been the key ingredient we've tried to add to every aspect of the game," Stratton stresses. "For characters, *Doom*'s demons are over-the-top in an action comic-book sort of way — so while fierce and deadly and scary, there is a levity they bring to the overall feel of the game. The environments, whether UAC (United Aerospace Corporation) bases on Mars or Hell, have a heavy and dense quality to them. ... We worked to infuse an element of personality into every locale — whether it's the lore or the quirky nature of the UAC. I think there's also an irreverence about *Doom* that we've tried to capture in a number of ways — from the blood and gore, to the style of combat that never lets you hide or stop moving."

Mooring is indeed key, especially if you intend to rain carnage upon the nervous snarling, shrieking and totally terrifying creatures the game has in store for you — including the lumbering tank-smelling Mancubus, soul-eating Harvesters, and cybernetically-enhanced Revenants. Often the only thing standing between you and a horrible death are rocket launchers, shotguns and a variety of other fatal armaments. *Doom* has always been — and still is — a traditional shooter, so the rules are simple: if it moves, pump it full of lead.

"As we talked about [*Doom*], we would implement new ideas, we always wanted the style and tone of the violence, blood and gore to make play-

ers laugh in disbelief more than cringe from the horror," explains Stratton. "Giddy enough, sometimes that meant more blood than less — a blood fountain when you shoot a certain's head is far more barbaric and fun than trying to make it horrific or particularly realistic. That said, we don't do blood and gore just for the sake of it; it's all part of a larger system that includes animations and sound that gives players an immense amount of feedback about the power of their weapons, their accuracy and the state — alive or dead — of a demon in the fight."

As you scurry through secret-filled corridors and hallways, hidden rooms, and stretches of high ground, inevitably seeking cover, it becomes evident that this isn't a game for anyone looking to sitler around sipping from ledgers or to camp out waiting to gather kills. This is a thinking man's battle royale, a fast-paced, frenetic campaign riddled with disgusting beasts, gory shootouts amplified by soundbites with hard demons and gunplay that all but requires you to sharpen reflexes you may not even know you had. *Doom* plays out across a series of maps loaded with the intricate, skull-scapegoat, blink decorations and other art pieces that'll have players greedily raring into the game's new SnapMap feature (a powerful level editor that allows gamers to mold and shape *Doom*'s terrain as they see fit).

"Artistic influences — like skulls — aside, for me this comes back to the idea of 'keep it fun,'" says Stratton. "But, I do have on another





Wash And Moosers: Up close with a Blood of Hell and facing an onslaught of Hell knights

rule." We've tried to use throughout development, which is to not take ourselves too seriously. Of course, we take our jobs seriously and our responsibility to the franchise seriously, but we've found that every time we create something that is really serious, it's just not as fun — particularly when it comes to combat. So, I think that's where we lean on that "rock and roll vibe." The best rock and roll doesn't take itself too seriously and is just plain fun. It's loud and bold, rebellious and independent — it's a rush."

In *Doom*, the rush comes from every direction, as it's a constant onslaught on the senses (and your sanity), but this is especially true of the game's Glory Kills system, a boon for bloodthirsty gore-munchers everywhere. Guns blaring is obviously the best way to approach some situations, but you'll benefit even more from snapping limbs, shattering skulls and painting the floors with guts. The development

team spent extra time and attention making these Glory Kills to perfection, right down to the animal details, soundbite and rewards.

"At about the same time we were figuring out the 'feel' we were going for with gameplay, our animation

team put together an aesthetic that illustrated the fundamentals of [Glory Kills]," he explains. "These are very fast, fluid violence kills that players can choose to execute if they've done enough damage to stagger an enemy. Visually it was chewing and snatching, but our animation team is bistic and we knew if we could get the tech right and, more importantly, the feel right, it would be a defining feature of the game. ... From a gameplay perspective, [they]

never interrupt the flow of combat and they avoid death and ammo — so it really plays into our 'rush forward combat' style of gameplay. Visually, they enhance the power fantasy of ripping and tearing

demons to shreds with your hands. It all comes together to really enhance the experiential feel of *Doom*."

But for all its similarities with the franchise's previous installments, there are also some notable differences. For instance, you can now jump and pair up at coves, adding to the game's immersive experience. You also can switch between several different upgradeable weapons on the fly, including shotguns, pistols and the RPG ("Big Frying Gun"), which does serious damage to your attackers.

In short, the *Doom* reboot is full of untested, high-octane frapping, but revamped in ways that are designed to appeal to a broader, older audience that wants the delicious adrenaline they've come to expect from games such as *Alien: Isolation*. This sleek and polished update of the classic shooter addresses those expectations by presenting a more cerebral, but still intense vision of Hell. It elevates *Doom* above the status of a mindless shooter, which many categorize the franchise (and the entire FPS genre) as being.

"We've tried to amplify the sensibilities, tone, attitude and mechanics of *Doom* to a level where it stands out as something different from the ecosystem of shooters," Stashko confirms. "We've focused on what we feel a *Doom* game should feel like and in many instances that's steered us towards decisions that are antithetical to the conventions of a modern shooter." In *Doom*, movement is king, your health doesn't regenerate, you don't take cover, so if you stop, you die, you don't reload, it's all about the combat, etc. ... [A]t its core, *Doom* feels different than a lot of other games on the market today."

If you haven't yet experienced this *Doom* (or, for that matter, the original), suit up as soon as possible — definitely before a lockdown sets its sights on you. That's the kind of one-eyed, burned, loopy, floating trouble no one needs. ☹





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AN EC-STYLE HORROR COMIC
GETS A PSYCHO-SURF SOUNDTRACK WITH THE
GRIM COUNTY CORONERS' TALES FROM GRIM COUNTY

HOT RODS AND HELLFIRE

BY APRIL SNELLINGS



THERE'S NO MISTAKING THE SUNBURNED PHANTOM OF CLASSIC SURF ROCK THAT HAUNTS THE FUZZED-OUT, REVERB-HEAVY MUSIC OF THE GRIM COUNTY CORONERS. But Grim County is a far cry from the bright

California beach towns where artists such as Dick Dale pioneered the sounds that would lay the groundwork for heavy metal. It's a place where

readers lurk in strip-tease bistros, cursed tapes line the porn shelves at the local video store, and hard-partying greasers OD on the scorched ashes of murdered vampires.

That grindhouse sensibility melds perfectly with the EC Comics-style spookhouse rhoads in the latest Grim County Coroners project. *Tales From Grim County*, out now from Sam and Manders Comics, is a rebo 40-page, black-and-white anthology comic with an accompanying full-length album that could easily be the soundtrack to a lost Russ Meyer flick.

"This is one of those little-pool bores kicked off for me," says Grim County Coroners mastermind Sam Kreep — already a well-known figure in the psycho-surf scene thanks to the music he's recorded under his other moniker, Kreep — an crafting a vintage-style horror comic. Kreep discovered the medium at an early age, when he received a stack of horror comics in return for participating in a neighborhood ball game. The young Kreep couldn't have cared less about sports, but the promise of new comics was enough to lure him onto the field

"I'd never seen anything like it before and I was pretty shocked — I was only used to Sunday funnies at that age," he remembers. "But pretty soon I was totally sucked in. I remember this one story about some kind of voodoo witch hag that appeared as a beautiful woman to the hunter she was trying to lure to her den. To this day, I can still see the picture of her true face on the last page when they did the big reveal."

That shocking flesh-panel twist is a tried-and-true horror comic device, and it shows up time and again in the pages of *Tales*. In Mike Hoffman's "Triple Mexico Curse," a trio of delinquent delphids get their comeuppance after swiping a porno tape from Madame Groselot's Video Shop. In "Dance of the Spider Woman," written by Kreep and *Tales*' publisher Will Perry, with art by Nik Polevick, a sleazy scammed/titty-bar owner runs a stripper factory in his basement, turning creepy-crawlers into voluptuous humanoid bombshells, setting up a final panel overflowing with boobies, claws and spider legs.

Kreep first began mapping out the Grim County lines after he recorded the latest Kreepco album, 2012's *Spook Clinic*. He describes the making of that record as "a pretty gloomy time," and he needed something that would make music fun again.

He found the creative spark he was looking for in an unlikely place: a pair of obscure 1968 German records: *Psychedelic Dance Party* by The Vampires



Sound Incorporation and Oricon's Music Cover by the Kingdom of Darkness both consist of musical cues for movies that don't exist (though the former would eventually find its way onto the soundtrack of Jess Franco's *Knave of Lust*), and Kneep saw an opportunity to tap into his love of gothic-house soundtrack while pushing the boundaries of his surrealist/fantasy world.

"It's really fun to listen to these crazy, psychedelic Euro-funk records and imagine what might be happening in each scene," he explains. "At the same time, I've always been influenced by wild cult, rockabilly and kitschmaker music, and something about allowing myself to lean more directly into those influences scratched some kind of deep itch."

The world got its first taste of the Corners in the fall of 2014, with the release of three limited-edition 45s that featured such tracks as "Up Jumped the White Devil" and "Gravely Dragged," along with a collector's box that included a board game designed by Detroit artist Robert Paul Nix and illustrated by Toronto's Grouse Nagas, a.k.a. the Happy Underaker.

"I was toying with the idea of eventually doing a full digital release of the tracks," Kneep recalls. "But I'm really more invested these days in making artistic packages to go with the music — something that makes the projects more three-dimensional."

The final piece of *Tell Tales & Scary Stories* when Kneep was contacted by Penny, who publishes scary-horror-themed strips online under his *Sex and Martini* banner.

"I was already a fan of Kneep's before reading out to *Doan*," Penny notes. "I thought his Grim County Corners music would be a lot of fun to interpret through the medium of a retro-horror comic book."

The two began exchanging story ideas and recording artists, and in about a year's time they had

the full *Tell Tales* package. The album collects eleven instrumental tracks steeped in B-movie samples and twanging guitar riffs that are fuzzier than a werewolf's backside, while the comic offers us tales (including Kneep's prose entry, a black-magic diabolical yarn called "Evilous Kneelious") and a slew of glossy, tripe ads that riff on come-hope mail-order junk. The stories are drawn and inked by a lineup of artists that includes Mike Vossberg, who illustrated most of the *Tales From the Crypt* covers created for the TV series.

"Each story in our comic started as an instrumental music arrangement, and from there we used the music to draw inspiration for characters and plot ideas," says Penny. "Once the story was fleshed out, we requested that each of the artists listen to the specific music track [that inspired their story], and use the music to influence their artistic style. Not only was this process fun, but it also gave a unique vision and connectivity to the stories. We really looked out because the artists who signed on for the project — Mike Hoffman, Mik Pohawka, Sam McKenzie, Robert Paul Nix and Mike Vossberg — surpassed our own twisted imaginations and really brought the stories to life."

Kneep loses the possibility of a return to Grim County — he says he's already got new material "in the works!" — but at the moment there are no concrete plans for future releases.

As for locating Grim County on a map, you'd have better luck borrowing bandaid oil from a vampire.

"I think Grim County is more like a *Twilight* zone affair," Kneep points out. "It's whenever you are when the unexplainable happens. You can be anywhere, doing anything when ordinary madness or the regular grotesque presents itself. That's where it lives. It's always been there. I've always been there."

TALL TALES & SCARY STORIES

The Magnificent Seven

Oricon TM7

As bands continue to sell their music as part of a bigger package, the need for related artwork and collectibles has opened up new creative avenues. For Sweden's The Magnificent Seven, those avenues are more of a lovely old road than a spooky forest.

The group's latest release, *Tell Tales & Scary Stories*, like the CD pressed in a book featuring a photo of a headless woman standing in the woods holding the head of a man in a top hat. Limited to 500, the beautiful hardcover has the lyrics for each song, along with an accompanying (gorgeous) ink illustration by Allen Eskberg, all on aged-looking paper — for that

giddy-creepy retro feel.

"It may not be quite as ambitious as the Grim County Corners' board game or EC-style comic, but it does its job in furthering the mood of the somber album full of songs about devils, witches, demons, ghosts, death and madness. The thirteen (notably) tracks have titles such as "The Underaker," "They Came From the Woods," "Devil's Island" and "Tango del la Muerte" and lyrics that are simple but effective.

For example, "I am the horror, I am obscene/ I witness and murder, the White Devil on a scene" ("Grind Guedes") keep things dark. The accompanying music is more complex, however, with thirteen players credited on the album with everything from saw to Theremin.

The feeling here is far from with a dash of foreboding. The Magnificent Seven are the musical kin of the likes of The Handsome Family, These Poor Bastards and, yes, The Grim County Corners, though *Tell Tales & Scary Stories* doesn't quite have the punch of those groups. Most of the songs follow the same simple formula, while delving into different folk sounds: adding different fearfulness of jazz, rock or even gypsy-style accords. Give it some time, and this one might grow on you like moss on the skeleton of a corpse long abandoned in the forest.

SEE

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GUNNE SHELTER

10 CLOVERFIELD LANE

Starring John Goodman, Mary Elizabeth Winstead and John Gallagher Jr.
Directed by Dan Trachtenberg
Written by Josh Campbell, Damien Chazelle and Matthew Shugart
Paramount

If you're gonna hunker in a bunker with a strong woman, don't punk her or she might turn it into a junker.

That's pretty much the trailer for 10 Cloverfield Lane, which came as an addendum to the giant monster movie Cloverfield! The 2008 film featured a bunch of twenty-something partygoers in New York City capturing the arrival of a city-slomping creature from space. While that film unfolds via first-person found footage over a few chaotic hours, 10 Cloverfield Lane is a (literally) confined, clearly one-location, standard-shot film with three main characters.

Mary Elizabeth Winstead (The Thing remake and the American version of TV show The Returned) stars as Michelle, a young woman escaping a break-up, who throws a box of personal items in her car and hits the road, only to get in

an accident. She wakes up attached to the wall of a bunker, bandaged and medicated. Her captor (or is it savior?) is brassy-set, middle-aged Howard (John Goodman), who tells her there's been "an attack," that he saved her after a crash and if she sets foot outside, she'll die. An injured young man named Bennett (John Gallagher Jr.) joins the mix; Hush! also made it into the subterranean shelter, but Howard can barely tolerate him. With no proof that a catastrophic incident took place, but plenty of evidence that her host is hiding something, Michelle hatches a plan to see what's outside these reinforced doors.

It's a fantastic concept for a low-budget (\$5 million) film, and 10 Cloverfield Lane writers Josh Campbell, Damien Chazelle and Matthew Shugart, along with director Dan Trachtenberg (guided by producer J.J. Abrams), do a helluva job revealing secrets, throwing in twists and hitting us with unnerving surprises. It's a very tense film, and much of the credit has to go to Goodman whose grizzily bear-on-teddy-bear? performance perfectly plays with our sympathies.

Winstead holds her own with her character taking a fairly unbelievable sharp turn into action hero territory. Other than that, 10 Cloverfield Lane's biggest obstacle is its title. Breeding itself as part of the Cloverfield universe may be necessary to get

those proverbial asses in seats, but it takes some of the wind out of the ending because we damn well know ahead of time that the threat has to be something not of this Earth.

Regardless, this is a top-notch terror trip into the belly of more than one kind of beast.

DAVE ALEXANDER

SILENT RAGE

HUSH

Starring Kate Siegel, John Gallagher Jr. and Michael Trucco
Written by Mike Flanagan and Kate Siegel
Directed by Mike Flanagan
Netflix

If you want to summarize Hush for a friend — a married psychopath plays out and mouse with a woman living in an isolated house — you would probably praise and think, "Wait, why am I recommending this? That's the most clichéd horror movie plot ever." Then you'd remember that Hush (which debuted on Netflix on April 6) is a lean, mean thriller directed by Mike Flanagan (Doctor, About a Boy) and recommend it without hesitation.

Still, that summary is accurate. Flanagan's co-writer Kate Siegel (who played Mimi in Doctor) stars as Maddie Young, a successful young novelist with a dash of writer's block. She's working on her second book in said isolated house with only friendly neighbors and occasionally ignored calls from her ex to disturb her. Oh, and Maddie is also deaf and mute.



Her isolation is broken when a masked killer (John Gallagher Jr. as *Overlord* Lyle) totes a crossbow and big knife starts toying with her. He knows Meddle can't hear and uses that to his advantage, like stealing her phone when her back is turned. It seems like only a matter of time until she dies handsly.

Like any first girl, though, Meddle is resourceful, resilient and will not go down without a fight. That said, Flanagan's female protagonists do not have a great track record — spoiler alert: they often end up dead (*Scout*) or disappeared (*Abigail*) — so Meddle's survival is very much in question.

Indeed, Flanagan and Siegel make it clear that they know the conventions of the home-invasion subgenre — like household products used as weapons, the neighbor who brings hope of rescue, the masked stranger, the turning of tables — very well. But they either defuse them (e.g. the killer takes his mask off soon after he enters) or make use of them with more subtlety and skill than we're used to seeing. The result is tense and dread that edges into discomfort. Will Meddle survive? The answer remains questionable right up to the end.

Credit the *Blumhouses*, then, with taking a hackneyed premise and, like its creatively blocked lead character, inject it with a welcome dose of imagination, making *House* a thriller worth shouting about.

SEAN PLUMMER

SETTING THE TABLE

THE INVITATION

Starring Logan Marshall-Green, Tamey Blanchard and John Carroll Lynch
Directed by Karyn Kassam
Written by Phil Hay and Matt Manfredi
Drafthouse Films

Better parties can be downright horrifying — and we're not just talking about forced conversation

with people you barely know or barely remember you can't stand. In *The Invitation*, a reunion of friends and ex-lovers in their mid-30s starts merrily and goes downhill from there — way downhill. Will (Logan Marshall-Green, *Prometheus*) and his girlfriend Rita (Emoryy Castellani) arrive at a posh dinner

party hosted by Will's ex-wife Edie (Tamey Blanchard) into the Woods and her new husband David (Michael Harner). *World War Z*, but it soon becomes clear that the hosts may have played a sort of cult whose creepy leader Pruitt (John Carroll Lynch, *American Horror Story*) is also there



The invitation immediately starts hinting that something's off. Where was Edie the past two years? What trauma ended her relationship with Will? Why does she keep smiling so forcedly? Will, on the other hand, looks quite unbalanced himself, assuming the stock role of a hysterical, suspicious host who is the first to cry shenanigans and the last to be believed. Still, since the film is told mostly from his perspective, the audience is put into his unreliable (?) shoes, reasoning between "This guy is obviously crazy" and "There's something sinister brewing here and this guy's the only one to see through it."

In terms of foreshadowing, toying with expectations and building a mood of increasing paranoia, director Karyn Kassam does an outstanding job. Ultimately, however, her dinner turns out to be all salads and appetizers. When it comes to the main dish, it arrives too late, looks meat, and is rather predictable. As it compensates for the long wait (actually the better part of the film, at least for the patient viewer), the very end goes over the top, resting on a final image that is both ominous and silly.

And yet, from the writers of *Clash of the Titans* and the director of the underwhelming Jennifer's Body (2008), *The Invitation* is a mostly pleasant surprise, better than it has any right to be.

DEJAN DJONJANOVIC

STRANGER DANGER

ROAD GAMES

Starring Andrew Simpson, Josephine de La Baume and Barbara Grunstein
Written and directed by Alvar Perrell
IFC Midnight

The great pulp writer Jim Thompson once said there's really only one plot: things are not what they

seem. It's true in real, and it's true in horror — two genres that intersect in the gloriously twisty (and twisted) UK-French co-production *Road Games*.

Road Games opens with a body being dragged from the trunk of a car, sunk into bile and buried somewhere in the French countryside. We don't get a look at the driver at the start, the first living face we see belongs to Jack (Andrew Simpson), a handsome young British twerker with no begis and a mysteriously bandaged arm. Jack is hitchhiking through France when he meets up with another woman, Veronique (Josephine de La Baume). The French-speaking beauty tells him there's a "serious killer" on the loose so they'd better stick together.

She means "serial killer," of course, and her linguistic stumble is more than a casual punch line. It's the first of many moments when language barriers complicate *Road Games*' plot, which sees Jack and Veronique accept a ride from a driver named Grizard (Frédéric Pierrel) who takes them to his country estate to spend the evening with him and his American wife Mary (game legend Barbara Grunstein). Jack doesn't speak French and Veronique speaks only broken English, and the communication problem inspires some of the best twists in writer/director Alvar Perrell's bilingual script.

It's hard to elaborate further without straying into spoiler territory. Suffice it to say, old gets weird once the young travelers get to Grizard's house. Grizard's behaviour is erratic at best, and Mary, with her cryptic warnings and thousand-yard stare, is clearly off her rocker. But for that matter, what do



REISSUES



THE VOODOO THAT WAS DO

THE SERPENT AND THE RAINBOW (1988) TV-14

Starring: Rob Paterson, Cathy Tyson and Zakes Mokae
 Directed by Wes Craven
 Written by Richard Maslow and Adam Rodman
 Screenplay by

Wes Craven made more than a few oddballs in his expensive career, but it could be argued that *The Serpent and the Rainbow* is his strangest. The movie is based loosely on the book of the same name by famed Canadian ethnographer Wade Davis, and by "loosely" I mean the film is hanging from its source material by the thinnest of threads. Shot on location in Haiti and packed with seamy and risqué sex, *Serpent* reinforces many of the racist stereotypes about voodoo that Davis sought to debunk.

When Harvard ethnobotanist/anthropologist Dennis Alan (Jill Pullman) is approached by a pharmaceutical company to investigate rumours of a Haitian drug that turns people into zombies, he travels to the exotic country to obtain a sample of the mysterious

powder. He's assisted by the lovely Dr. Duchamp (Cathy Tyson), but he's got his work cut out for him – Haiti's on the verge of revolution, the locals distrust him and the sinister Captain Dargent Peytraud (Zakes Mokae) is ready to go to great lengths to see that Dennis fails at his mission. Not only is Peytraud chief of the corrupt police force, but he is a powerful bokor (sorcerer) who is able to invade his victims' dreams and capture their souls.

Even the most devout fans of the movie admit that it's problematic: several of its troubles are illuminated and explained in the making-of featurette, wherein Davis himself describes how Craven wanted to play the story straight but succumbed to the studio's demand for the gruesome horror he was famous for. As a result, *Serpent's* breathtaking view of Haiti and astonishing practical effects remain obscured by its confusing storylines and contradicting mythologies. The Blu-ray offers a gorgeous restoration of the film and an audio commentary by Pullman, but unless you love the film for its



many eccentricities (or are looking to complete your home Craven library) this is predominantly a sobering reminder of *Serpent's* wasted potential.

ANDREA SCHIACCI

BLOBBLEHEAD

FRANKENSTEIN (2007) TV-14

Starring: Helen McCrory, Penny Dreadful and Lindsey Duncan
 Written and directed by Jed Mercurio
 BBC

If you've ever wondered what the ugliest creature on the planet is, that's easy: it's the Blobfish. We know this because a few years ago the Ugly Animal Preservation Society – yes, that's a thing – awarded it the (dis)honour after a holding vote. The gelatinous, deep-sea critter basically looks like the melted head of the cartoon character Ziggy crossed with a Lovecraftian Fleshlight. Weird, icky, sad and gooey, but far from frightening – it could only look slier if squeezed its head and put it in a hoodie, which is the problem with this 2007 BBC production of *Frankenstein* the monster subsequence.

It's a damn shame because writer/director Jed Mercurio penned an interesting script. In this iteration of the classic tale, Dr. Victoria Frankenstein (Helen McCrory, *Penny Dreadful*) is pushing the boundaries of stem cell research by growing viable organs for transplants. Spurred on to save her dying son, she throws caution to the wind and ends up growing more than just parts in her lab's organ bank. When a lightning strike causes a power outage, something escapes the protein shake and starts killing. The creature, known as "the UX" is also made of her child's DNA and inevitably tries to come to grips with what it is – all while Victoria's estranged husband Henry (James



Purefoy, *Resident Evil*, Solomon Kene), Victoria's boss (Lindsay Duncan, *The Reflecting Skin*) and a shady bodiless firm step in to control the mounting mayhem.

Growing the creature in a tissue bath is the ideal way to modernise the tale (and add some gross visuals), and Mercurio's script contains some neat twists, including an ending you won't see coming. However, there's just no getting past the laughable creature design or the cheap CGI used to bring it to life.

The whole movie is plagued by budgetary constraints, though, including the laboratory, which is stitched together from a bunch of warehouse junk, a modified van lurch and a lot of caution tape. Sooo much caution tape. If only these scientists were more worried about



The good

the implications of playing god than they were tripping on a clap.

The lesson here is that Frankenstein's monster must retain a reasonable level of physical humanity if we're going to identify with it. Otherwise it's just a blobby way out of its depth.

DAVE ALEXANDER

WIL WHEATON STANDS ALONE

THE CURSE (1987) *Reun*

Starring Wil Wheaton, Jesse Fair and J. Eddie Peck
Directed by David Keith
Written by David Keith

CURSE II: THE BITE (1989) *Reun*

Starring Wil Wheaton, Jesse Fair and J. Eddie Peck
Directed by Fred Goetzman
Written by Susan Zedoff and Federico Fellini
Screenplay by

The year 1987 gave us one of the best H.P. Lovecraft adaptations of all time. A smart, fresh, actor-packed take on HPL's myths that proved a worthy follow-up to 1985's *Re-Animator*.

That adaptation is *The First*! Ghostbusters' episode, "The Collect Call of Cthulhu," in which Egon Spengler and co-must prevent cephalo-gods return when the Necronomicon is stolen by a doomsday cult. Oh yeah, that year also saw the release of *The Curse*, a loose taking of Lovecraft's "The Colour Out of Space" that plays like a bad Stephen King flick.

Like King's "The Lovecraft Death of Jorj Vennil," *The Curse* concerns some simple backwoods folk whose lives are ruined by meteor shit. Specifically, a meteorite that resembles a giant testicle crashes on Farmer Nathan's (Claude Akins) property

and promptly shoots goo all over his crops. Only young Zack (Wil Wheaton) suspects something's wrong when the far-out space-nut goo turns people into justice-covered, drooling monsters with Star Trek alien foreheads. Curse's scripting duties fell David Chasen, who expands Lovecraft's story by adding pointless subplots about gold-digging wives and crooked land developers. Since Chasen didn't direct *Curse*, he's likely not to blame for the many scenes of an overweight bully in too-light clothes that leave his hairy gut and bulldozed exposed, but it seems like a given when you realize Chasen's previous screenplay was the delightfully homoerotic *A Nightmare on Elm Street Part 2: Freddy's Revenge*.

The second half of this Blu-ray double bill, *Curse II: The Bite*, drops Lovecraft, meteorites and land developers to tell an entirely unrelated story about radioactive snakes

and a man with a giant serpent for a hand. This "sequel" has an even shoddier script, but this is partially compensated by Screaming Mad George's FX work, a no-bad-it's-good score by Tool 2 composer Carlo March Cordo and a wonderfully out-of-place supporting role for MPA's "SW" actor Jamie Fair as a sleazy salesman. Screen Factory reentered both titles, giving us the best possible quality for this release—for what

it's worth. The real gem here, however, is surely the *Curse* trailer, which contains the immortal line "Wil Wheaton of *Stand by Me* must stand alone against *The Curse*."



creeps who drag Elizabeth into the basement torture chamber (see cover art) for some flogging and near-branding, and stragglingly odd nudity that still manages to allow a nipple here and there.

That's part of the film's marginal charm: the director's, cinematographer and focus puller never paying quite enough attention to get things exactly right to make their little movie into a minor classic. The Bava-zooms are ludicrous, the perpetually howling dog is more evocative of a Mel Brooks genre satire and Franco Polesini's lounge score (isolated in a mono music and effects track) is pretty bland.

Twilight Time gathered authors/historians David Del Valle and Derek Roliah (The *Argento Syndrome*) for a lively and enjoyable commentary track. Although Schur is often mumbling English, this release features Italian audio with burned-in subtitles and the HD transfer is quite radiant. Whether it's a classic or minor entry, it's all about valuing a nutty genre that's still poorly represented in HD in North America.

ADAM CLARKE

TEMPLAR TROUBLE

LA BAMBOLA DI SATANA

Starring Eric Schur, Roland Carrey and Aurora Borealis
Written and directed by Ferruccio Casapinta
Twilight Time

The scant backstory on the genesis and making of *La Bambola di Satana* (a.k.a. *Satan's Doll*) is more interesting than the final result by one-time film director Ferruccio Casapinta. And yet genre fans will undoubtedly be curious to see whether the same and previously "lost" entry delivers that classic genre's mix of violence, nudity, sleaze and mystery.

Documentarian Casapinta applied for a grant to make his own gothic drawing room thriller, and when given the funds, he reportedly had no idea how to realize his script, prompting the film's assistant director to take over filming and prevent a complete disaster. Star Eric Schur (*Ship Made for Your Kites*) branded Casapinta "an idiot," and yet, like a Herschel Gordon Lewis film, there are stylistic elements that make this borderline amateurish giallo rather charming: saturated colors and overlit, thinly decorated sets, wonky editing and sudden scene transitions, and stiff performances worsened by basic, overly long dialogues.

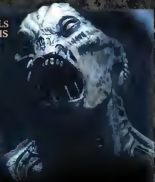
Schur, in a wooden performance, plays Elizabeth, the favorite niece who's drawn by boyfriend Jack (Roland Carrey) to a remote Italian town for a reading of her uncle's will. Everyone expects she'll get the (literal) castle, so the crux is whether she'll stay or leave after selling the property to a peasant neighbor. As the spoiler-heavy main titles reveal, there's a murder, Templar-geared

MARK R. HANSEN

WITH THE SEX-DRENCHED SPECIES SEQUELS GETTING A BLU-RAY RELEASE, WE GIVE THIS '90s-SPAWNED SERIES A SECOND LOOK

VERY CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

by SEAN PLUMMER



SEX, SCI-FI AND HORROR HAVE BEEN, AHEM, BEDFELLOWS FOR DECADES.

Think Ming the Merciless looking after Dale Arden in the 1930s Flash

Gordon movie serials, the bedroom politics of 1950s B-movie *I Married a Monster From Outer Space* or the alien-human fucking in the Dan O'Bannon-written *Heavy Metal* comic story "The Long Tomorrow" (1977). Interspecies lust is nothing new.

Species upped that anatomical ante in the '90s with boobs, blood and Ben Kingsley. The 1995 sci-fi/horror hybrid, about scientists Frankensteining alien and human DNA to create a creature with an out-of-this-world sex drive, twisted Mary Shelley's ideas with a pedigree that belied its B-movie roots. More importantly, it raked in US \$113 million for MGM on a \$30-million budget. Of course it was going to get a sequel. Actually, it would get three, all of which are available now on Blu-ray, via Screen Factory.

The original starred comely Newfoundland-Nova Scotia headbanger as Sil, an alien-human hybrid who spends much of the film naked and in heat. In her alien guise, Sil is a Giger-esque beast (designed by, yes, H.R. Giger) whose offspring could annihilate humanity. She's it: destroyed at film's end. Or is she?

Producer Frank Mancuso Jr. (*Friday the 13th Part 2*) answered that question three years later. Directed by Peter Medak (*The Changeling*), *Species II* sees Henshedge reborn as Eve, a genetically identical version of Sil who finds herself psychically linked to Patrick Ross (Justin Lazard), an astronaut infected with Sil's alien DNA after visiting Mars. Unable to control himself, Ross fucks his way towards Eve, leaving a pile of female corpses (and offspring) in his wake.

Where Sil's sexual need came off as titillating, Ross' reproduction by rape is repugnant. *Species II* took the original's sophisticated sci-fi sex and violence and mutated it into something ugly and stupid. Maybe MGM wanted a date movie; instead they got a date-rape movie. The film tanked.

But the studio was not done moonbathing naked alien blondes. Six years later, Mancuso set up *Species III* at the Syfy network. Shot on ugly high-def video with a fraction of its predecessors' budgets, it sees Sil

gracelessly killed off minutes into the film, after giving birth. The purest hybrid yet, Sara (Sunny Mabrey), is hunted/courted by "half-breeds" hoping to extend their brief lives. Core sex and nudity are all present and accounted for; only entertainment is missing.

The latest (and presumably last) entry, *Species: The Awakening* (2007), was made on an even smaller budget but benefits from better FX and ideas. Ben Cross (*Dark Shadows*) classes up the joint as Tom Hollander, a scientist whose "niece" Miranda (Helena Mattson) grew up not knowing she's part alien. When the alienage in her emerges, the pair leg it to Mexico where Tom enlists the aid of a brilliant former student to suppress Miranda's burgeoning alien side and sexuality.

Species: The Awakening (2007) benefits from striking visuals (jazz alien nun!), dark erotica, and dialogue that intelligently evokes Shelley's ideas about humanity's Prometheus siblings. It's a formidable step up from Sil's root. Plus boobs.

Screen Factory's *Species II* stand-alone Blu-ray includes frank new interviews with Henshedge, writer Chas Bolson and creature effects head Steve Johnson, whose reflections on Giger are worth the purchase price alone. The *Species III* *Species: The Awakening* double feature repackages the former's previously released features, while *The Awakening* gets new interviews with director Nick Lyon and star Mabrey, both of whom reminisce about the challenges of working in Mexico. They are handsome packages for sometimes ugly films about pretty women who kill.

Let's face it, none of the *Species* films are exactly out of this world, but they do remind us that the future is both friendly and to be feared.



THE LATE-NITE ARCHIVE

FILE

Blast From The Past

by Paul Corio

At a time when every city-living moviegoer slumping across the silver screen seemed to be a veiled reference to atomic Armageddon, *Panic in Year Zero* (1962) was the first to show that the survivors of a nuclear attack may not be as fortunate as you might think. This outstanding Cold War nightmare, now on Blu-ray from Kino, follows a family of survivors that must acclimate the necessities of life while civilization crumbles around them. But as the patriarch, played by Ray Milland, discovers, there's something even more upsetting than seeing what's left of the social fabric ripped apart by savage thugs, and that's discovering that you're one of them.

Milland, who also directs, keeps the pace brisk and manages to get around budget limitations by telling the story almost entirely from the family's point of view. Up early for a camping vacation, Harry (Milland) along with his wife Ann (Jean Hagen) and teens Rick (Frankie Avalon) and Karen (Mary Mitchel) are already cruising down the highway, trailer in tow, when it happens—a blinding flash in the rearview and suddenly LA is no more. With a mushroom cloud still hanging in the air, they stop at a roadside diner only to find it crisscrossed with other parked families escaping the wreckage. Taking a detour off the beaten path leads them to a small town where they load up on groceries, but the family soon runs into trouble: a hardware store owner refuses to cash an out-of-state check, forcing Harry and Rick to take what they need at gunpoint.

More challenges await as they make their way to safety: a roadblock designed to keep out looters, a relentless deluge of traffic on a highway they need to cross and a mob of teen roughnecks looking for kicks and easy marks. Arriving at a secluded campground, they slash the trailer and set up house in a cave, hoping to wait until some sense of order is re-established. "When civilization gets over-



kized again, I'll rejoin," quips Harry. But before then, he must deal with some old friends—not only the hardware store owner, but also the teen gang that has hid up nearby. Things come to a head when gang members Mickey (Lex Haiman) and Andy (Juel Newton) rape Karen, forcing Harry to grab a gun and head out for revenge.

Although a handful of post-apocalyptic fables had appeared throughout the 1950s, including Hollywood epics *On the Beach* (1959) and *The World, the Flesh and the Devil* (1958), *Panic in Year Zero* was among the first to play up the potential violence of the situation. The film's poster promised as "An orgy of looting and lust" and that's just what the film delivers as it follows the breakdown of society, small love doctors fend off "dope addicts," the government shakes looting a treasonous crime and desperate survivors must take what they want by force, including resorting to murder.

As Harry sets about finding shelter and food for his family, he's initially intent on maintaining a sense of civility. A gas station attendant who tries to prize grease from gets socked in the jaw,

but Harry puts a couple bucks in the pocket anyway. And he still "pays" for his hardware store purchase with that out-of-state check, even as he and Rick fend off the store owner. Yet despite these compromises it's clear that Harry is uncomfortable with the position he's put in, and cautions Rick against taking any pleasure from doing what is necessary to survive. "I want you to use that gun, but I want you to hate it," he warns.

But Rick does seem to enjoy these tactics too much, and even accompanies Harry to confront the gang about Karen's rape. On returning, Harry has a breakdown, unable to reconcile his interest for morality with his pledge to protect his family. "I killed two men," he laments to Ann. "I looked for the worst in others and I found it in myself."

It's this scene that provides the key to the film, a chilling and engrossing post-apocalyptic thriller that subverts the usual fears about a dangerous foreign power pushing the button and explodes a world where survival and savagery go hand in hand. More subtle than the giant monster epics that unspooled on drive-ins across North America at the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Panic in Year Zero* is a dire warning that nuclear war could destroy something more clearly held than our cities, our economies and our families: our very sense of self. **B**

STAR, JOHN HENNINGSEN, AND A BEAST





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IT CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

Gene and the Mystery Machine

by John W. Bennett

I'm tempted to invoke John Grisham here — "And now for something completely different" — to set up this column, except that last month's edition of *I Survive the Living* was a bit of a deviation from the Bowen's Basement norm as well, if such a thing even exists. Well, whatever. Two early catalysts for my damaged psyche — the real ghostbusters and the real bob bar — have collided in *Scooby-Doo!* and *KISS: Rock and Roll Mystery* (2013) and I must spring into action. It you'll be so good as to help me off the couch.

KISS was integral to both my adolescence and my continued aesthetic development in middle age. How integral? Well, does copping my first hot, in a bathroom no less, during Peter Dinklage's drunk solo in *KISS: Alive!* count for something? Granted, pretty goddamned significant at the time. A few years prior, the earliest seasons of *Scooby-Doo* on Saturday mornings played as pivotal a role in my nascent redemptive odyssey as *WSTN's* *Monster Movie* Matrix would on Saturday afternoons. Suffice to say, once my 2016 inner child got over the brand-streak of seeing the Warner Bros. logo instead of Hanna-Barbera during the opening credits of *SOANNAHANE*, I dug in deep for the duration.

The plot's about as standard as one could ask, which is a good thing — our anarchic sleuths pile into the Mystery Machine and head for the (allegedly) haunted KISS World amusement park. After the howlingly bad *KISS Meets the Phantom*, you'd think the band would want to steer clear of movies about amusement parks that tie it almost like a bad for redemption. And if so, it mostly works. There's no point in further exposition here, but suffice to say the KISS guys (except themselves) reactively join forces with the Scooby gang and deploy their superpowers to unravel a mystery involving the Crimson Witch, who's going to unleash the Destroyer (seriously) from anoth-



er dimension if she can get her hands on a black diamond (like, seriously) codenamed the Detroit Rock (aka, also seriously). To count the number of (mostly) self-deprecating KISS references on tap here, even the most ardent fan will require multiple viewings.

As for the non-KISS cast, some characters are voiced by unknowns while others stake for some interesting footcuffs. Matthew Lillard (Gomez), who played Shoppy in the live-action *Scooby-Doo* movie, reprises his role, and *The Facts of Life's* Mindy Cohn voices Velma (likely causing our beloved April Shillings to burst into girlish squeals and pee a little bit). Money-grubbing KISS manager Craig McGee is played by their real-life money-grubbing manager Doc McGhee (who previously wrangled both Don John and Mötley Crüe). Kevin Smith and Jason Mewes have cameo (can you do that in a cartoon?), Garry and Penny Marshall are the amusement park supervisor and fortune teller the Elder (good, seriously), and the Destroyer is voiced by Garret Rucker. Yes, the gay boss *Hot Chick* & the *Reckless* — there's a name I never imagined typing for anything *Rue Morgue*-related. Oh, and there's also an unprecedented love triangle: delectable Daphne is hot for Paul Stanley, and poor Fred

is passed about it, sniffing that while KISS isn't bad, his love band is Acet Five (And yes, we get to hear Acet Five — actually members of KISS — perform their single, "Don't Tug My Acet [It's Not a Scar]").

Parade beware — nostalgia is intended but not completely absent. For instance, I'm not sure how I feel about Scooby's newfound verbal skills. Oh sure, he's still about as articulate as *Avril Lavigne*, but he's no longer baying out consonants and Dinklage utters the occasional complete sentence. Progress? Pop-cultural blasphemy? Both? Well, let's just be thankful that his shark-jumping relatives Scrappy-Doo and Scooby-Dumb remain safely untouched to the island of ill-conceived *Amity* Characters. Toward the end, brainy, pedantic Velma actually steps back and assesses her whole schtick for the first time in 40-odd years. Well, maybe not her whole schtick, since she doesn't address her popular image as a deeply repressed lesbian, but for the love of Gertrude Stein, people, whaddya want from a kids' movie?

For the Scooby gang, a haunted amusement park mystery is basically another day at the office. But what did KISS get out of this thing? Redemption for their first movie via good-natured self-parody? A more-rete-than-thou wink at fans and detractors alike? Hard to say, but if it's there and while no KISS members are named in the writing credits, you can bet they cheered self-referentially all the way to the bank. Now get the hell out of my basement, you meddling kids. (There, I've said it.)



& the *Reckless* — there's a name I never imagined typing for anything *Rue Morgue*-related. Oh, and there's also an unprecedented love triangle: delectable Daphne is hot for Paul Stanley, and poor Fred

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BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

by PEDRO CAJETEVELO

The wickedest man in the world or misunderstood prophet?

British occultist Aleister Crowley continues to battle and enthrall people a century after he expires. Accused by the contemporary press of perverting ritual blood sacrifices and numerous sexual abuses, including bestiality, Crowley nevertheless inspired his newfound magico-based religion, Thelema, was benign – despite its hysterical-sounding motto: “Do what thou wilt.”

While Crowley didn't invent occult religion, his activities, alleged and otherwise, propelled the notion into the public consciousness. Crowley's legacy ultimately influenced actual Satanists such as Anton LaVey, as well as the horror genre. From Rosemary's Baby to Hammer's The Devil Rides Out to M.R. James' Ghosting the Rules, Crowley's shadow looms large despite the man himself remaining an enigma.

Irish writer Marin Hayes and artist Roy Richard Stewart are the latest to attempt to unravel fact from fiction in the semi-biographical graphic novel Aleister Crowley: Wandering the Waste. For the book, Hayes has gathered some of the more notable and controversial events in Crowley's life and wove them into an intricate narrative.

“Crowley, for me, was a character who, the more I read about him, the more I wanted to know,” he says. “There always seemed to be some juicy or enigmatic morsel of information that was just out of reach. So when I saw that a publisher was looking for biographical projects, the opportunity to go back and piece together a story from all those scattered details seemed like it would be both extremely satisfying work, as well as interesting fun.”

Originally released in 2013, the book has now been reissued with a complete redesign and extensive notes, illustrations and quotes, as well as bonus materials.

It opens on Crowley's last days in 1947 at the

Netherwood boarding house in Essex, England. Aged 72, infirm and addicted to heroin, Crowley agrees to tell his life story to a writer named Hayes. We learn of his birth in 1875 to a highly fundamentalist Christian family, his sexually rebellious youth and subsequent expatriation to the occult, the creation of Thelema after his meeting with a supernatural entity named Aiwass, and his eventual drug addiction and public scolding by the press.

“Crowley's time at Netherwood, the last couple of years of his life, has always been particularly fascinating to me,” says Hayes. “There's something undeniably romantic about that image of the old Magus in retirement, living quietly in a guest house by the sea. So as I was thinking about how I might plot the book, I knew I wanted to end at least some of it at Netherwood. With that in mind, the idea of fictionalizing a young writer to come and visit the elderly Crowley in the hope of writing the Great Beast's life story seemed perfect for my needs.”

That included finding the right artist for the project. Stewart excels filling the book with a succession of talking heads by creating elaborate collages brimming with original art, photos, slogans and occult symbols. Highly inventive and creative, each page turns a visual puzzle that is as fascinating to untangle as the source material.

“I would send him a full script, with each page broken down into panels, each panel described in detail – clearly always with the understanding that if he saw a better way of doing anything, he should go ahead and do it his way,” explains Hayes. “I would also

send a lot of research images, down to photos of particular museum display cabinets and era-specific curry powder tins. But it was Roy who would bring it all to life on the page, his collage



Aleister Crowley: Wandering the Waste focuses on “the Beast.”

work is amazing.”

Stewart doesn't shy away from depicting some of Crowley's more sordid and disturbing accounts, such as his strangulation of a cat, or his attempts to mate his wife with a goat. Moments that reviled as of Crowley's reputation.

“I can see why writers would base their scandals on him,” allows Hayes. “That notion some people have, of the brooding magician, casting spells and summoning demons to exact revenge on his enemies is undoubtedly appealing if you're looking for a good villain. But it's a shame that, for many, that tabloid image is the only one they have of the man. He was many of the awful things people said about him, but I do believe there was a generous dose of good in him too.”

For more information on Aleister Crowley: Wandering the Waste, visit paracore.com

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Gutter Magic posits a world where magic won World War II and, nearly a century later, wizards, sorcerers and other fantastic creatures lord over ordinary people. Cinder is one such non-powered human who is determined to find the spell that will grant him the abilities he covets. With his partner, a poblin named Blacktooth, he continues to track down this elusive solution, running afoul of many supernatural enemies, including the soul-stealing temptress The Morgue, her undead daughter Shiver and her gang the Ghost Knives, and a giant, fire-breathing dragon. Fast-paced, creative and a lot of fun, *Gutter Magic* is full of appealing characters and witty dialogue, with plenty of barbs flying between the chattering Cinder and the cynical Blacktooth. There's even some welcome (and unobtrusive) social commentary bubbling underneath the clever script and slick art—in case you need to stop and catch your breath.



Salem City has become a battleground for supernatural forces in *Reck of the Ellicked Witch*. Demons have slaughtered an entire coven of witches save for one in a desperate effort to fight back, the surviving witch resurrects a female vampire in the hopes of harnessing her powers. Will the witch be able to fight off a horde of attacking demons and a vampire who refuses to become a slave? Hex is a



throwback to '80s comics such as *Lady Death* and *Purgator*, with plenty of babes, boobs and blood. Since this is the opening chapter, it's hard to say if it will eventually evolve, but for now, there's little beyond the superficial trappings. That said, Frank Forte's art is pleasing, if a bit rough—yet it fits the material.

I'm not quite sure what to make of *Rivers of London: Night Witch*, the continuing misadventures of full-time police constable and part-time wizard, Peter Grant. Russian hoodlums attack a London prison transport in an effort to rescue a female political prisoner who used to be a member of an elite Soviet squad of witches. Unfortunately, she doesn't wish to be rescued and does all she can to remain a British captive. And so begins a political

game of cat and mouse, with many of the series' supernatural trademarks outlined, at least for this first issue. On the one hand, the book is well drawn and written. Still, it spends too much time on exposition and sketching in the political background of many of the players, which, while probably a necessity, doesn't exactly grab the reader or play to this series' supernatural strengths. Long-time fans may be willing to stick it out, but definitely not a good starting point for the uninitiated.



Marvel's sorcerer supreme, Doctor Strange, is riding high in a new series and storyline ("The Last Days of Magic") that affects the entire Marvel universe. The mysterious Empirikal are robbing Earth of its magic by destroying mystical landmarks, artifacts and sorcerers. Top on their list: Doctor Strange. The opening salvo is a protracted fight between Strange and the Empirikal leader, a pale, skull-faced behemoth. Stripping the Marvel universe of its supernatural trappings is an intriguing premise,

but the fight itself is somewhat dull, with Chris Bachalo's art doing little to convey the action or the stakes. In fact, the back-up story (also written by Jason Aaron but drawn by a handful of different artists), which demonstrates the effects of the battle's fallout on humans who dabble in magic, is far more interesting and entertaining than the main event.

I haven't looked at John Constantine since DC's fateful decision to cancel *Hellblazer* and shunt the character over to the execrable *New52*. But I'd be remiss not to include the most notorious occultist ever created for comics in this round-up. Alas, the latest issue of *Constantine: The Hellblazer* merely confirmed my fears that the character has been severely weakened and sapped dry of his charm. His surroundings are just as dull as he is: A visit to the dangerous (we're told) land of Faerie is nothing but an unimaginative fetch scene, with rainbows instead of blood. Worse: the second half of the issue is taken up with Constantine whining about living in New York and constantly placing his new gentleman friend in danger. It's a sad state of affairs for someone who used to be the most dangerous and unpredictable mortal in comics.



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NINTH CIRCLE

BOOKS

CULT CINEMA: THE ARROW
VIDEO COMPANIONAnthony Field, ed.
Arrow Films

Arrow Video is well known to genre film buffs as a DVD and Blu-ray distributor of horror and cult cinema, but now the company has taken that love a step further. *Cult Cinema: The Arrow Video Companion* is a richly illustrated long-size hardback in which genre experts delve into all things cult, with a strong emphasis on horror at least eighteen essays out of 30 are horror-related.

Ben Wheatley's lacklustre autobiographical intro is followed by twenty essays previously featured in Arrow's booklets or discs, while ten have been especially commissioned for this 246-page book. The quality of writing is uniformly high, as is to be expected from such well-established authors. Although brief, the essays are crammed with information and insight, and are certain to bring new and worthy material even to seasoned cinephiles.

The material is divided into five chapters. The first, on key cult movies, contains some of the best writing in the book. "The House is the Monster" (Tim Lucas on Roger Corman's use of colour in *The Fall of the House of Usher*), "Murder Set Pieces" (Alan Jones on *Deep Red*), "A Battle Without End" (Tom Mes on *Battle Royale*) and, especially illuminating, "American Gals" (Mickel McDonald on *Dressed to Kill*).

It's followed by the entries on Directors, in which Caelum Vatnsdal writes on David Cronenberg, Mike Sutton on Wes Craven and John Kenneth Mur on George A. Romero. Actors, in which David Del Valle sheds light on Vincent Price and Vic Pratt on Boris Karloff, Genres (and Sub-genres), which includes an all-too-brief introduction to giallo by Michael Wadzenko, a solid mini-essay on *Consummation* by Rue Morgue's Paul Czapka, the always reliable and exhaustive Kim Newman on Christmas Horror and an unexpectedly fun one on Food Horror by Joel Harney (inspired by, but not limited to, Larry Cohen's

The Stuff). Finally there's Distribution, with fine reminiscences of the Early Days of Cult Cinema, Video Nasties and Horror Festivals, Fanzine and *Nakamotok*.

The essays in this compendium prove that valuable writing is often found in liner notes and DVD booklets. Arrow's *Cult Cinema* does them justice by its all-around lavish treatment, which also includes another stunning cover illustration by Graham Humphreys.

DEJAN GOLJANOVIC

THE KAIJU FILM: A CRITICAL STUDY OF
CINEMA'S BIGGEST MONSTERSJason Barr
McFarland

There's nothing short of a Godzilla-sized pile of books devoted to giant monster movies – it's probably the most covered genre film line the side of classic Universal horror franchises. The latest work to take the big-screen beasts head on is Jason Barr's *The Kaiju Film: A Critical Study of Cinema's Biggest Monsters*, a well-written and thorough peek at the phenomenon, that also delves into a variety of possible social, historical and political interpretations of these films.

All the usual suspects are represented, from Godzilla and Gamera to King Kong and King Ghidorah, but Barr's scholarly analyses also highlights lesser-known kaiju such as *Daimajin* and *Gappa* alongside modern American depictions (2008's *Cloverfield* and 2013's *Pacific Rim* are covered). Arguing for kaiju to be recognized as its own distinct genre, Barr performs a good dissection of the influences and context under which these films have flourished. Starting at the birth ground of Japanese mythology and

intended more for academics than casual readers, it's convincingly argued, if occasionally overly serious – Barr decries those who dwell on the "cheese" of the genre, and draws a distinction between serious *kaiju* works and films for "entertainment only." In truth, this line doesn't need to be absolute – it's certainly possible to enjoy the films as spectacles while simultaneously appreciating their deeper themes. Likewise, an afterword that lays out the author's concerns about the future of *kaiju* films leaves perilously close to enthusiastic handwringing. Still, it's not enough to sully this otherwise thoughtful appraisal of Godzilla and friends, which reveals just how popular many of these films stamp their way through Japan's rich historical and cultural landscapes.

PAUL CORIORE

SUDDEN STORM: A WENDIGO READER

Curated by Larry Fessenden
Fadedbook

Given the importance of the wendigo to North American First People's folklore, and how many films, novels, TV shows and comic books have incorporated the entity, it's shocking that it hasn't been explored more in non-fiction. So credit to Larry Fessenden for curating *Sudden Storm: A Wendigo Reader*, a collection of essays, interviews, historical accounts and pages of scripts from his own wendigo-themed movies. Like the mythical beast itself, however, a proper wendigo remains elusive.

Without a doubt, *Sudden Storm* boasts some very illuminating essays, such as Chris Hibbard's previously published "The Many Faces of the Wendigo: An Examination," which gives the monster vital historical, cultural and even pop-cultural context, and Carter Meland's "It Consumes What It Forgets," which specifically places the folklore within the stories of the *Alekhut* Indian people to explain how it functions as both a cautionary tale and a teaching tool. So if you're unfamiliar with the wendigo, the book offers all the necessary background, much of it genuinely horrific, such as the descriptions of the slow, torturous process in which a





Sudden Storm: A Wendigo Reader



human who succumbs to starvation and consumes the flesh of another slowly transforms into a hideous beast with an insatiable appetite. (Surprisingly, there's no comparison to zombie lore here.) Almost every writer re-introduces the wendigo, unfortunately, making for annoying repetition.

Take note, a reader is not the same as an editor, and it really shows here. While some material is unnecessarily repeated throughout the book, other vital information is missing. For example,

Evenden interviews a filmmaker but gives us zero background on him, leaving the reader to guess why he's relevant to the book. The interview is also listed incorrectly in the contents, which is a sloppy mistake in a release that feels half-cooked (an essay arguing that *The Shining* is a wendigo tale stretches its argument so thin you can see right through it) and padded out (the unnecessary script pages).

As an added bonus there is some fantastic artwork in *Sudden Storm*, however, such as Donald Carson's chilling creature sketch, but again this element is inconsistent: some images are blurry, some seemingly missing and filled in with stilt from one of Evenden's movies and, in one case, we're given a cropped, blown-up scan of Gey's *Salmon Devouring His Sons*.

Despite the shortcomings, *Sudden Storm* is still worth owning for the insightful essays and chilling folklore. You'll just want to pick the good meat from its stunted frame.

A COLLAPSE OF HORSES

Brian Evenden
Gothic House Press

DAVE ALEXANDER

Literary horror: if the phrase does not scare you, your nerves are strong enough to take the latest collection of stories by Brian Evenden. He is a three-time G. Henry Prize winner and International Horror Guild Award-winning author who happily straddles both literature and horror in an amalgam that's rarely so powerful and convincing as in this collection.

Literary, in Evenden's case, does not imply an impenetrable style or experimentation to the point of obscurity; quite the opposite, his prose is eminently readable. But it means that the author evades easy answers and generic tropes, and bases his effects on ambiguity, uncertainty and suggestion, creating an unknowable cosmos that easily slinks to the point of a claustrophobic menacem. His characters are lost, searching for meaning, struggling to make a reasonable account of events that

DANTE'S PICK



FURNACE

Linda Uwevelyn
Word House

it's difficult to apply everyday judgment. Linda Uwevelyn's action, and her second collection of short stories, *Furnace*, isn't made this way either. I'm only reminded of the poverty of my own words in comparison to hers. Luscious, disgusting, mind-bendingly complex, sexual beyond imagination: *Furnace* is that good.

In many ways, Uwevelyn is proudly settled in the weird fiction explosion currently sweeping the horror community. The seeds of cosmic horror planted in her previous collection, *Engines of Gashe*, have grown lushly here, with each story's mostly female characters succumbing to fates beyond comprehension. These non-linear tales unfold much like the bodies within them, transforming and regenerating in supplication to nameless forces, all rendered in Uwevelyn's sumptuous prose.

However, she also transcends the weird label with her uncompromising realism, starting with the J.G. Ballard-esque opening tale "Paraploos," in which a first-person narrator stalks through a named industrial landscape and plans revenge to a disintegrating couple having vigorous sex in an abandoned subway car. It continues through the collection: characters straddle and yield to all sorts of overtures, from insect phobias to branches springing from a delirious redwood. There's even a queer twist on gothic horror—"Yours is the Right to Being" explores Mrs. Barker's experience under hypnosis in *Quercus*, with ravishing and violent results. However, the sexuality in these stories is never played merely for hollow titillation: it also represents an all-consuming elemental power and an awful yielding to the machinations of nature. In "The Last, Clean, Bright Summer," we read the diary entries of a young girl on what appears to be an innocuous seaside holiday, only to learn it's all part of a horrifying reproductive ritual involving a giant woman, beached on the shore like a pregnant Grendel. In *Runover*, sex has the potential to imprison as much as it liberates.

My favorite story features a somewhat different collision of bodies: "It Feels Better Being Down" embraces the oft-used horror trope of creepy twins and takes it to a nightmarishly surreal level, combining body horror and gallows humor in a way that is utterly unforgettable. Like the rest of *Furnace*, it's all-consuming, totally fearless and absolutely worthy of your attention.

ALISON LANG

GRADY HENDRIX SWINGS THE HANDS OF TIME BACK TO THE 1980s FOR HIS RETRO POSSESSION TALE, MY BEST FRIEND'S EXORCISM

Demon Trouble like Big Time

MONICA S. KUEBLER

AH, THE 1980s, THAT UNFORTUNATE DECADE OF BIG HAIR, JELLY SHOES, ACID-WASHED JEANS AND DAYTIME TALK SHOWS SOUNDING

the horns about suburban satanism. Three decades later, you'd think we'd be looking back and laughing, but hardest horror has embraced the era, and we're getting retro-themed throwback films and books, such as Grady Hendrix's *My Best Friend's Exorcism* (out May 17 from Quirk Books).

"I blame the title," says Hendrix, author of 2014's *Remember*, about why he picked that love-it-or-hate-it decade for his new novel. "I had the title before I had anything, so I knew this book had to be about a best friend who's possessed by a demon from Hell; otherwise it's blatant false advertising. Friendships are at their most intense in high school, so I knew that's when I had to set it, and my high school experience is the one that's most vivid to me, and that happened way back when dinosaurs walked the Earth—1988. Once I picked that year, coincidences kept piling up: '88 was a big year for the Satanic Panic that gripped America and made people think Satanic were after our kids. It was Reagan's last year in office, which brought the '80s to a close, and it was the year of America's first school shooting, in South Carolina, no less."

Indeed, *My Best Friend's Exorcism* is unashamedly retro. The book's cover looks like a high school yearbook, each chapter shares its name with a popular song from that decade ("The Number of the Beast," "Sunday Bloody Sunday")

and "Dancing in the Dark" all make appearances) and references to the era's pop culture artifacts come fast and furious throughout this story of Abby and Gretchen. The girls have been besties since grade school, but all that begins to change after Gretchen mysteriously goes missing during a weekend away with friends. When she turns up, she's different: her personality undergoes a seismic shift, she begins to draw those around her to ruin, her personal hygiene deteriorates, a rotten meat slush permeates everything she comes into contact with and she seems to constantly be at war with herself for losing her

friend, judging by her outbursts. Gretchen's parents blame drugs—and Abby suspects something unholy.

"I remember watching people I loved change drastically at that age," says Hendrix about the appeal of an exorcism narrative. "It was like they were possessed. One day we were friends and trading action figures and building ramps for our BMX dirt bikes and the next day they hated me, they hated BMX and they were ranting and raving the loudest. It's just called growing up, but it was terrifying. The problem with an exorcism narrative is that they mostly consist

of a young girl being tied to a bed while a bunch of older men shout at her. The possessed person is barely involved in her own story. I wanted to write a possession book that flipped the script and made who the demonic is—and her actual experience—matter."

True to this, Abby and Gretchen's mostly unswerving and believable friendship forms the backbone of the story. The adults here are largely useless (because that's how teens perceive grown-ups, Grady explains) and even the religious roadshow member Abby eventually connects with abandons her when the occupying demon proves too tough.

If writing an authentic friendship between teenage girls wasn't challenging enough, many writers would find it daunting to write a book in such an oft-misused decade, but Hendrix says that wasn't case, though he did have to completely rework things after his wife got her hands on his first draft.

"She read it, then sat me down and told me it was an embarrassing, derivative piece of hot garbage," he admits. "After I stopped crying I realized she was right. I had let '80s movies about high school infect my own memories. I was writing '80s clichés and high school stereotypes. So I sat down with all my wife's photos and letters from high school, and I pulled out all my [old] diaries and yearbooks and I spent weeks reading them. It took a while, but then one one-ane memory of what it had actually been like to go to high school in 1988 bubbled up, then another, then more, and before I knew it I was diving down deep into an ocean made of Caps Lock." 





planet penetrates everything, even the postcard, oxygen-deficient minds of a miners' crew in the best, blackly absurd tale, a man is increasingly estranged from his new wife and from the alien, constantly shifting environment of a French "Seaside Town."

If these seventeen tales whet your appetite for more (Denning, like *notice* that the collection is accompanied by three newly issued novels: *Last Days*, *Father of Cleveland* and *The Open Curtain*, also from Coffee House Press).

WARLOCK HOLMES

G.S. Denning
Titan Books

Sherlock Holmes may be the most famed fictional character of all time, surpassing even Dracula, but these iterations of the world's most famous consulting detective tend to new close to Arthur Conan Doyle's original portrayal. Even in fiction, new tales of Holmes tend to be reverent to his creator's vision. At least until G.S. Denning and Warlock Holmes came along, casting the character into a decidedly supersaturated mold.

This new tale places the sleuth in a Russian Victorian world where Dr. Watson represents the detective and logical side of the partnership, while Holmes is the fantastical and mysterious one. Denning utilizes the classic Conan Doyle stories, but imbues them with fresh paranormal twists, much to the chagrin of Watson who always believes he has the logical solution. In "The Adventure of the ...skitter ...," much like in the original story "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," Watson deduces that it's a cobra sent through the vent to murder the sleeping victim, but here it's actually a man practicing Indian Fakir to combat his own inner impossibility long, soulless apprentice.

Not only do the plots undergo a supernatural shift — "A Study in Scarlet" becomes "A Study in Brimstone" and "The Adventure of the Resident Patient" becomes "The Adventure of the Resident Sacrifice" — the characters do as well. Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard is revealed to be a vampire and Inspector Tobias Gregson (here renamed Torg Gregson) is an ogre. Warlock Holmes explains to Watson that it's in his best interest to solve these detective cases in order to keep suspicion about what they really are from the rest of Scotland Yard.

At times, the stories have a humorous bent similar to Douglas Adams or Terry Pratchett. In one tale, for instance, Holmes ingests a solution of ipe, mercury, strychnine and cyanide (in allusion to the seven percent solution). As planned, the chemical issues him intoecstasy, giving him a moment of peace from all demons knocking around inside his head, instead of killing him.

Denning is superb at capturing the tone and characterizations of Watson's first-person narrative. His reveal of the Warlock Holmes character is engaging and full of mystery, keeping the reader wanting more. My only complaint? The book ends on a cliffhanger, though that only leaves me more eager for Denning's follow-up, *The Battle of Baskerville Hall*, due out next year.

BRENTON BENTZ

LIBRARY OF DAMNED

AN ANTHOLOGY WITH 14 CHAMBERLAIN COLLECTIONS

The Brian Stoker Awards will be handed out on May 14 at StokerCon, so I decided to corner Michael Crichton — the role self-published author on the list — who's up for awards for the oceanic horrors of

his novel *The Deep* and his YA novel *The Ridealong*. The latter concerns Officer Latham in cop on his first day back after losing his partner in a botched shoot-out and his teenage daughter, who are forced to play a frantic, gruesome game of cat-and-mouse with a mysterious, threatening voice over the police radio, while also attempting to outrun a dirty cop who's intent on killing both of them. The story trades in vengeance, murder and unknowable evil, while packing gory set pieces (a broken-based but still-living man folded up in a car trunk, for instance) and a third act twist that finally secures it as a work of object horror.

THE RIDEALONG IS A CONCEPT STORY, SET OVER AN ACTION-PACKED 24 HOURS. WHAT SPARKED THAT CONCEPT? I had this idea for a very quiet moment between a father and his daughter that came sideways in the most disconcerting way possible, and because I'm aw, that had to become a book.

THE STORY IS NERVEWRACKING BECAUSE WE DON'T KNOW THE EXACT NATURE OF THE VILLAIN UNTIL THE END. HOW DOES THE CONCEPT OF "THE UNKNOWN" AND "THE UNKNOWABLE" INFLUENCE YOUR WORK?

I am a huge fan of these two things in horror. As soon as we know something, it ceases to control us. When we name something, we define it, and the very definition of "define" is to give it boundaries, to rein it in, to put it in charge of it. When we are the ones driving the creature, instead of the other way around, it is hard to fear. That is why all horror stories are, to some extent, mysteries.

THE BOOK HAS A RAUHER SUBSTANTIAL TWIST IN ITS TELLING. HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO CATCH THE READER OFF GUARD?

Very. But I don't like to think of what I do as a twist, rather as a revelation. I like to give a final, tiny piece of information that makes the reader re-examine every single thing that's gone before, to hit themselves on the forehead and say, "Of course, it's all there. Why didn't I see that coming?"

WHY IS SELF-PUBLISHING THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR YOU?

The fact is, I had to get traditionally published with it, I did you not, every single traditional publisher in the US and Canada. And, also I did you not, if you had set me on fire and killed me into their office not a one of these would have paid on me to [put] out the flames. So I had to go self-pub, and luckily I was able to make a living with that. And even more luckily, it's something I enjoy doing.

MICHAEL S. CRICHTON

FRIGHT GALLERY

CURATED BY GARY PULLIN

THIS MONTH: CLARY MAKES THE CUT

Charles Clary makes mind-bending paper art using a very unusual medium: VHS boxes. He's collected over 1500 used VHS tapes, sourced from various thrift stores, and strategically cut out areas of the existing box art, putting stacks of thick, coloured paper into them, and cutting down into the layers, with each stack carved out smaller than the last, to achieve vortex-like designs that can resemble guts or smoke.

It's tedious work but Clary finds it meditative and cathartic, he's created about 400 of the pieces so far, and is able to make them at a pace of about one per hour. It was his struggle at home that led him into the creative arts, while horror films and gory practical effects provided a much-needed escape into creativity. As of press time, he had been prepping his solo show for an online year. It opened on April 22 for the ArtFields 2018 competition in Lake City, South Carolina.

What gave you the idea to create these paper sculptures?

I feel a pretty rough upbringing. Both my parents were alcoholics, which led to neglect and poor living conditions. In the constant despair, movies became my outlet, an hour and half where I could be somewhere else. I quickly fell in love with the horror genre and the practical effects it uses. In February 2013 I lost

both my parents to smoking-related cancers and through my grief process rediscovered the nostalgia and escapism these videos provided me as a child.

What kind of reaction do you hope the viewer takes away from your artwork?

With the VHS I hope the viewer connects to the nostalgia and escapism that films provide and remembers what it was like to have a VCR, rewinding films to watch a death scene again, or the gritty textures of the film.

You've moved away from the VHS boxes a bit recently with more original sculptures such as the Phantom ball. How did you construct it?

The Phantom ball is made of a Dollar Tree Christmas ornament, which I hand-painted, cut open and filled with paper — with metal cut-outs for the spikes and drills. The prop replicas are a lot of fun because they give me a chance to make a physical reproduction of an iconic object from a film.

Why VHS boxes?

As an adult I see all these VHS (tapes) in thrift stores and bargain places being sold for \$1 or five for \$1 and it's tough because these are the films that saved me from the brink, I feel like I'm giving them a new life.

Where do you go from here with this concept?

Eventually, I'd like to rent out an old rental store like I have it filled with all of my VHS and prop replicas... I'm playing with movie posters at the moment — mounted to drywall and then deconstructed — as well as video game and console boxes. Love doing movie props out of whatever I can find and custom designer vinyl heads. I'm a bit of a workaholic.

See more of Charles' work at charlesclary.com and on Instagram at [@charlesclary](https://www.instagram.com/charlesclary).



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THE GORE MET

MENU: CHAINSAW CHeddar



Rack in the '70s and '80s, Toronto television station City TV, the inspiration for Civic TV in David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), used to run *Late Great Movies*. They played films such as *Neurol* and *Muscle*, *Rik* *Floyd* at *Pompeii*, *Zed* and *Mud* *Max*. I didn't know it, but I was being schooled in cult cinema. By the time VHS exploded, I was savvy, and I knew when I rented the Vestron release of Juan Piquer Simon's *Pieces* (1982) that it was destined for cult classic status.

Pieces is not very good. It's outrageously awful, intuitively, but that's exactly what makes it a definitive cult film. The plot is bog-standard '80s slasher cash-in nonsense. In the righteously gory prologue, a young boy caves his mother's skull in with an axe after she catches him putting together a jigsaw puzzle of a nude peep-show model. The cops intercept him in the act of cutting her corpse into pieces and he hides in a closet, presumably getting away with her murder. Flash forward 40 years — a trench-coat-clad, black-glove-wearing killer is carving up curvaceous



pleenatorial interview. The script was so fancy he made up scenes on the fly to pad the running time. For example, sort-of famous martial artist Bruce Lee was visiting the set and was recruited for a bit of pretty sad comedy. "Hey, it's my kung fu professor!" The girl skateboarding into the great murder makes zero sense and adds nothing to the story, but hey, it's a girl skateboarding into a giant mirror!

Amidst the general goofiness, there are bits that are surprisingly effective and even stylish. There's a lengthy segment where a dance student is stalked after a rehearsal that's as beautifully lit and shot as anything in an Argento palette. Unfortunately, it ends with the killer following her into an elevator with a chainsaw hidden behind his back! The giallo comparison is apt, as *Pieces* is a clumsy mimic of better Italian films drenched in slash-motifs.

Grounds. Releasing out a well-reviewed two-disc DVD set of *Pieces* in 2006. For the new Blu-ray release, they went back to the original negatives and re-scanned them at 4K. The image quality is

phenomenal. The packaging is the same as the company's high-def release of Lucio Fulci's *The Beyond* (1982), and it too comes in a double-disc Blu-ray case in a slipcase with the soundtrack in a separate sleeve.

All of the extras on the DVDs were ported over, in high definition, and like the DVD set, there are both English and Spanish-language soundtracks. The English audio track has sleek Goblin-esque music from the Italian CAM Library label (which is on the included CD), while the Spanish track has an original piano and synth-based score by Liberator Pastor. The Spanish track surfs (not just from being dubbed) and the music frequently bursts into overblown silent-film-era bombast. New to Blu is a "music only" track by Umberto, a full-length suite of deliciously creepy electronics also in the Italian prog-rock tradition.

Also new to the set, and the gem within, is Scottish genre scribe Cillian Waddell's 62-minute talking-head documentary *42nd Street Murders*, featuring reminiscences of that infamous New York City block of movie houses by such grindhouse luminaries as Sam Shearon, Joe Dante, William Lustig, Frank Peseliter and Lloyd Kaufman. They both de-mythologize and honor that strip of groovy theatres, amidst clips from films that were shot on the street. Waddell also moderates a cool commentary track by Spanish cinema stalwart Jack Taylor. Granted, it's early, but it's going to take something extra special to unseat *Pieces* as the release of the year.





SALES *from the* CRYPT

A Florida gardener, his finger pricked by an aggressive hedgehog, wrote this one. "Down here, around, everywhere, there's proof that he was right. He might also have added, everything possible. And beyond."

— Jack Ketchum, author of *The Girl Next Door* and *Off Season*

...the fascinating geographical comparisons within Florida horror fiction were more compelling and enlightening. An absolute must-read for horror junkies!"

— Edward Lee, author of *Healer, City Infernal*, and *Three Kingdoms*



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Horror Guide to Florida



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Senior Editor at
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LISTEN TO MY NIGHTMARE

Bloody, asquith, yeb, the abominable snowman – whatever you call these gaelic-boreal monsters, their muscular, masculine, ferocious image lends itself particularly well to metal. They're represented this month with recent releases from both California groove metalers *All Hail the Yell* and British Columbia's more crustily heavy *The Mountain Man*.

On its second full-length, *Screens From a Black Wilderness*, on Minus Head Records, *All Hail the Yell* presents a concept album based around confine horror stories, each song representing a fully realized spooky tale. The opening track is a story told from a child's point of view.



"Before the Flames" is actually part two of a three-part story told in reverse," says vocalist Connor Gentry of the song. "It's about the horrors of the orphanage where a young girl's parents left her. The nuns that are running the place aren't what they seem. There are awful things going on behind closed doors; the children are subjected to unrelenting and abusive rituals."

Though the band's moniker is almost an accident, the yell is a symbol with which they've come to identify.

"We were originally called Yell, and before our shows we would have the crowd chant 'All hail the Yell!' and it just sounded so much cooler, so we went with that," Gentry explains. "It wasn't about the actual animal as much as the myth, the terrifying legend."

Meanwhile, in B.C.'s primary Canadian stomping grounds, the BC backwoodsmen of *The Mountain Man* just released their debut independent EP *Bloodstir*. While *All Hail the Yell* cuts through its heaviness with a dosage of groove and melody, *The Mountain Man* hooks straight into the underbrain with non-stop aggression, calling to mind the speed of Black Dahlia Murder and the pummeling of Lamb of God.



"When we first decided on the name, we thought it was a perfect fit for a metal band from British Columbia," says vocalist Parker Lane. "Over time, the asquith has become somewhat of our mascot. We're pretty outdoorsy. BC definitely stands up to its slogan of 'Super, natural British Columbia.' The asquith is also something that's usually thought of as living here in the BC forests and mountains. We're definitely proud of where we're from."

Though there is no specific horror concept to *Bloodstir*, the band's sheer brutality is combined with violent lyrics that capture the snowy savagery of their homeland. The most depraved moment comes on EP's title track.

"Think of the person you loathe most – someone who has wronged you, apped your leader out and face-fed them back down your throat at some point in your life. Now think of hanging that someone, bound at their wrists, in the middle of an empty room. Strung up like a decorative pillow, you're beating them mercilessly to an agonizingly slow death. We're all capable of letting that inner monster out to play. 'Bloodstir' is the soundtrack for the coming out of that inner monster."

AARON WISE LUTTEN

opening track "The Devil's Widow." Elsewhere, on "Flower Phenomena," he provides suitably macabre lyrics (inspired by Ronald Fraser's 1966 novel of the same name) to O'Brien's '60s pop melody. Organ solos, fuzzy guitars and stomps at pagan evil make *Lord of Absurd* a perfect soundtrack for your next Delia: copy or human sacrifice. **B.B.B. SP**



BEASTMAKER

Luxus Materae

Rise Above Reason

The cover of *Beastmaker's* debut LP, *Luxus Materae*, features a knife-wielding, crimson-clad ghoul over a background of seagulls that pays tribute to Amanda de Cossio's *Black Dead*, while the band logo, rendered in a gothic, blood-dripping red, recalls early Hammer horror. With metal currently saturated with horror and occult-themed doom rock, any head rock heathen worth his Necronomicon knows exactly what's in store when getting this one on the turntable. Twelve tracks of black, furozed-out Sabbathian decay played at molasses speed are the order (pardon) of the day, and though it all sounds right, none of it will stick to your ribs quite like the puffed-out poetry of *Diatribae*, *Electric Wizard* or *Mo-Fin* – all superior acts channeling out satanic sludge for eons now. "Ancient," "The Stair" and the rest are all competent and creepy, just not unique enough to rise above the smoke. **B.B. JES**



EMEAHMER

Emancipation from the Crypt

Reign of Horror

The last few years have seen a surge of metal record labels snapping up

"legacy" acts and missing new material, hoping to squeeze some revenue out of name recognition from nostalgic fans. Plenty of these are talented, but death metal DC ad Emeahmer is the real deal. Its 1988 EP *There Were Blood Everywhere* is still highly regarded in extreme metal's underground circles, and *Emancipation from the Crypt* seeks to maintain that gore-soaked nihil. Forgoing slick modern production and compression, Emeahmer keeps the proceedings raw and brutal. The title track busts forth with a bone-shaking low end and riffs firmly rooted in the Autopsy/Repulsion tradition, while slow stalker "The Casket Calls" evokes the evil early days of *Scream Bloody Gore's* *Death*. Like many of its peers, Emeahmer teeters on the edge of having its songs all sound the same, but luckily there's enough variety and creep atmosphere on *Emancipation* to satiate the blood 'n' guts faithful. **B.B.B. GR**



VREDEHAMMER

Vindicator

Reign of Horror

Lashes and gorefest, blackened Norwegian death metal is alive and brutal. Vredehammer's sophomore album is fast, filthy and freezing ferocious, inspired with a bloody infectious groove from top to bottom. At times, it sounds like a non-industrial Shining (also from Norway) teaming up with Meshuggah to cover some old *Emmure*, *Death*, *Morbid Angel* and *Satyricon* tunes. The epic solos will send you in to orbit, before going back to the battlefield to slaughter a legion of evil Christians... or something. Lyric-wise, frontman Per Valla (ex-five axeman for the mighty Abolition) took inspiration from Stephen King's library of literature and various old horror movies. Everything about the album's recording is simply crushing. Forget about Anas Anath, Vindicator overflows with the best Norse deathbangs' melodies by which to decapitate your enemies. **Epic stuff. B.B.B.B. RG**

PERTURBATOR
RETURNS WITH A NEW ALBUM OF HORROR
AND SCI-FI-INSPIRED DANCE MUSIC

NEON MANIAC

GEORGE BACHECO

PARISIAN RETRO-SYNTH FORCE PERTURBATOR IS ON A SONIC MISSION TO EXPLORE VAST, EPIC SOUNDSCAPES INSPIRED BY FILMS

like *Suspense*, *Alien* and *The Running Man*, and artists such as Giorgio Moroder, Vangelis and Tangerine Dream. But more than that, the man behind it all, James Kent, designs it for the dance floor. For five years now he's been releasing numerous club-friendly EPs and LPs as Perturbator, mixing all manner of horror and dystopian sci-fi. We caught up with him to discuss *The Uncanny Valley*, his new full-length album on Flood Music, out May 5.

WHAT ARE THE INSPIRATIONS FOR THE BAND?

I used to be a guitar player before Perturbator. I played in a couple of groups, mostly local metal bands. Playing an instrument is fun, but it's really the writing aspect that I'm passionate about. So, one day I just decided to get a bunch of references and try my hands at electronic music. The idea was to make it sound like the classic score from *Blade Runner*, with influences from Dario Argento and John Carpenter soundtracks as well.

I'VE READ THAT *AMMÉ*, CYBERPUNK FICTION AND HORROR/SCIFI CINEMA HAVE INFLUENCED THE *UNCANNY VALLEY*.

I've always been very curious about lots of different art forms — video games, movies, literature. I can't really tell you when my interest in sci-fi and the occult began, I'm sure it's buried into everyone's minds somewhere, though. Dinosaur landscapes, religious imagery, badass heroes, monsters: it's the stuff we see in our dreams, and everyone can relate to it. Fiction is the only thing we have left to escape our mundane lives and I simply wanted to make my music another escape route through the use of familiar sounds, cinematic strings, en-mascarades. It's hard to define how it works. But when people listen to one of my tracks, I really hope they feel like the lost human in a world that's dominated by machines.


DO YOU WRITE ALBUMS TO BE LISTENED TO IN SEQUENCE, AND IF SO, HOW IMPORTANT IS TRACK ORDER IN THIS REGARD?

I think order is very important to me, actually. I want my albums to flow like stories. I feel that if we were to compare music to movies, songs would be like specific scenes from said movie and that's cool if you just pay attention to some scenes, but for example, the ending tracks of my albums aren't placed at random, they're a conclusion. The first track in an introduction: listeners are told not for you to catch your breath again. Listening to a bunch of random tracks (no matter how good they are) simply laid out in no specific order isn't very interesting for me. I believe that an album should be like a journey. But yeah, I know that nowadays most people don't really mind that and only play the songs they like. It's okay. It forces me to try to make every single track interesting in its own way as well.

WHAT IS IT ABOUT THOSE CLASSIC ITALIAN HORROR SCORES THAT MAKES THEM SO POPULAR TODAY?

Absolutely, yes. Classic Italian horror movies have such a mysterious and nightmarish vibe to them, with *Suspense* being one of my all-time favorites. The whole movie is like a gongoro nightmare, you just can't take your eyes away from it. And yes, all those composers were huge influences, just as much as their American peers. They brought that foreboding Italian groove and a whole aesthetic aspect into modern synth music.

WOULD YOU CONSIDER THE ALBUMS THEMSELVES TO BE IN A LINEAR ORDER? DO YOU COMPARE EACH ONE TO THE PREVIOUS ONES?

I compare them a lot. And it's what helps me stay creative, actually. Whenever I finish an album, I start thinking about what's the next step and how to move forward from that point on. So, I often look at what I've already released, check the things that I don't want to do again in order to not repeat myself, check the ideas I lacked but want to explore further, etc. . . It's important for me because I want everything to be coherent, while still being some surprise. I would never want to release an album if I don't believe it's better and/or different than my previous ones. 



PLAY THEM

NOW PLAYING > KHOLAT, DEVIL DAGGERS



KHOLAT

PS3, XBOX 360
MARCH 10



Imagine this: you're lost in the unforgiving northern reaches of Russia with only a topographical map and a compass to guide you through the snow. Sound like fun? Your answer will largely determine whether or not you'll enjoy the indie survival horror game *Kholat*.

Developed by Polish company IMGN PRO, *Kholat*'s plot is centered around the real-life Dyatlov Pass accident, in which nine hikers died under suspicious circumstances in the Ural Mountains in 1959. You are ostensibly sent up there to investigate, but the game provides little to no direction. As you wander the terrain, trying to match map and compass readings to your locale, you'll find pieces of paper that offer clues to what happened to the hikers (there's something about an escaped serial killer and a secret Russian facility conducting experiments on human subjects). You'll also encounter ghosts and a mysterious orange fog path of which fall on contact is not to be prey to venous superstitious events, including an ever-elongating hallway and shaking structures. Along the way, you'll find additional co-ordinates scattered into stones, etc., to transcripts and clues.

There's no fighting in *Kholat*, and no way to defend yourself,

so you'll spend plenty of time running away from threats and getting lost in the blowing snow and similar-looking landscapes, unless you have some serious map-reading skills, this gets frustrating fast. It doesn't help that you'll probably discover the story's pieces out of order, making the narrative even more confusing.

Though *Kholat* gets a boost from some great narration by actor Sean Bean (who also whispers strange and foreboding things to you as you stumble upon key areas) and

the addition of fast travel points that make moving around the map quicker, it's still a whole lot of waiting. That said, *Kholat*'s scenes are genuine and effective, from the strange phenomena you experience to the ghosts that chase you, and the incorporation of radio cues starting you to nearby clues is a great, immersive touch. However, like the great, wide North itself, it's all too sparse and spread out, meaning you'll likely be wandering around based more than your heart will be pounding in terror.

Verdict: Into this cold, dark night of your own risk.

MOMCA S. HUEBLER



DEVIL DAGGERS

PC
JUNE



Remember when shooters were hard? While there's something to be said about taking a leisurely stroll through the excessive 3-D worlds of current-gen titles, playing *Devil* on "nightmare" difficulty or reaching a late stage of *Resident Evil 4*, our modern games haven't exactly been able to scratch for something truly challenging.

One *Devil Daggers*, an impressive indie title that's put me through one of the most challenging gameplay experiences this side of *Dark Souls*. Featuring a rugged polygon aesthetic that's reminiscent of id Software's masterfully influenced *Doom*, the title's first-person shooter gameplay is smooth as silk, accessible and borderline hypnotic.

Players can choose to fire magic daggers in a steady stream or as a shotgun-like burst, a decision that will make or break the success of a run as waves after waves of flying skulls and twisted, waif-like creatures do their very best to finally decapitate you.



With an intensely atmospheric fog-of-war effect and truly unsettling audio design (the skull splatters are especially sickening), the game manages to achieve within a matter of seconds, especially if the player is wearing headphones.

Devil Daggers is consumed in short, intense bite (it's like a comic book and a film), but the field and additive gameplay mechanics give it a long-lasting appeal despite its difficulty. In addition, the game features a

brutal replay system that makes watching your Steam "friends" struggle with it both easy and intuitive. Those looking to be instantly humbled can also check out trophies from the top of the leaderboards simply by clicking an eye-shaped icon that appears beside each player's name.

Glossing the high scores may have made my 60-second run seem pathetic by comparison, but I'll be damned if I won't be masochistically trying to add just one more second for years to come.

EVAN MILLER



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CLASSIC CUT

DOCTOR WHO: "THE ARK IN SPACE"

RODNEY BENNETT & UK -1975

Despite being perceived as a sci-fi series aimed ostensibly at children, *Doctor Who* has produced a surfeit of horror tales throughout its 53-year history. Many of these hair-raising hybrids are worthy of veneration but few equal "The Ark in Space" for sheer skin-crawling ghostliness. Marshalled by BBC producer Philip Hinchcliffe and story editor Robert Holmes, and starring Tom Baker as the charismatic fourth incarnation of the Time Lord, this second story of the show's transformatively twelfth season inaugurated the "Golden Age" of *Doctor Who* (1974-1977), a period renowned for its narrative ingenuity, technical brilliance and gothic horror tropes.

The four-part adventure begins with the TARDIS materializing on the space station *Nerva*, which is orbiting Earth in the year 19687. The Doctor and his companions Sarah Jane (Elizabeth Saden) and Henry (Ian Marter) learn they're not alone, as the planet's human elite have been cryptically preserved onboard for thousands of years in the hope of one day repopulating a world devastated by solar flares. Upon awakening from their hibernation, the crew of the *Ark*, led by Commander Noah (Kerion Moore), discover that a parasitic alien species known as the Werns has infested *Nerva* and intends to use its inhabitants as hosts for their larvae. Can the Doctor prevent the Werns from possessing and consuming their bodies...and thereby absorbing all of humanity's knowledge into a new mind—before it's too late?

A milestone in the series, "The Ark in Space" wears both the strengths and frailties of vintage *Doctor Who*. The pacing is at times plodding, particularly during episode one in which the Doctor and his friends explore the seemingly deserted facility, but Holmes' sparkling scripts (written in eighteen days after a previous story proved unsatisfactory) wing every last drop of tightly-wound tension from an economical plot. Furthermore, the brightly lit sets (that so often sabotage the ominous mood of Classic Era yarns) add a clinically sterile look here that contrasts sharply with the mucous-secreting monsters.

Admittedly, "The Ark in Space" is often cited as an illustration of the impoverished special effects found in *Doctor Who*. The Wern larvae is clearly fabricated from bubblewrap (a fairly obscure material in 1975), while the full-size creatures—mashed roses with two eyes, six legs and a green complexion—were built from latex

over a bamboo frame and crowned by a fibreglass head section. These monsters are more frightening conceptually than visually. Indeed, the idea of the Werns crawling surreptitiously into cryogenic chambers and using the meat tentacles as both incubators and a sticky-made meal is, as the Doctor gloomily affirms, "almost too horrible to think about."

This open evocation of parasitism and mutation places the story in the realm of body horror, predating *Alien* and its lineage. The extent to which it influenced the 1979 blockbuster has been debated, but both feature a metamorphosing creature depositing spores inside a human host, as well as a limited cast of nervous players in a claustrophobic spacecraft housing people in a state of suspended animation. *Alien* screenwriter Dan O'Bannon was renowned for "borrowing" ideas and it's doubtful he was unfamiliar with the show (although *Doctor Who* scribbles also plundered countless concepts from pulp magazines). Incidentally, the designer originally hired to work on the 1963 serial "The Daleks" was Ridley Scott but a scheduling conflict meant the honour of making the iconic monsters instead fell to BBC staffer Raymond Cusick.

Additionally, episode three of "The Ark in Space" initially featured a harrowing sequence in which the maddening Noah, now clinging to the last vestiges of his humanity, begs a fellow crewmember to kill him. Excused by Hinchcliffe from the finished programme (resulting in a noticeably jarring edit), this moment was deemed too disturbing for an early evening audience. However, a retrospective *Afterlife* legendary "cannon scene"—omitted from the release version by Scott but reinstated in his 2003 *Director's Cut*—in which Captain Dallas, his exhausted body spun

into a wisd envelope, pleads with Ripley to annihilate him.

In only his second outing as the Doctor, Tom Baker already owns the role. Thirty-five years after his unprecedented seven-season tenure ended, the image of the boogie-eyed bohemian with curly hair and a lachrymose grin—framed by the fedora hat and long multi-coloured scarf—remains indelible. For millions of fans and casual observers, Baker simply is the Doctor, despite the excess of a dozen other actors having tackled the part in television, radio, theatre and film for more than half a century. He is, as his Fourth embodiment once assuredly declared, "The definite article, you might say."

MICHAEL DOYLE



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